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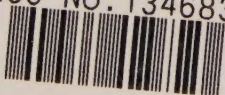
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THE LETTERS OF
AN ENGLISHMAN



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THE LETTERS OF AN ENGLISHMAN

[WHIBBLEY, Charles]

LONDON

CONSTABLE AND COMPANY LTD.

10 ORANGE STREET LEICESTER SQUARE

1911



D1931.25 (A)

PREFACE

THE essays contained in this book have been published in the columns of the *Daily Mail*. Though they treat of many subjects, they possess, I hope, that unity, which comes from a settled purpose and a consistent point of view. They rarely touch upon the fierce controversies of the moment. The Toryism, whose principles they would set forth, is the Toryism, not of politics, but of life and letters.

And never was there a stronger obligation to plead the cause of Toryism than to-day, when nothing is accepted that is not strange, when the most of men believe that salvation is to be sought only in new theories of life. Once upon a time Shelley confided to the pages of an inn-album that

he was an atheist, a democrat, and a philanthropist, and it was easy to forgive the exuberance of his youth. It is less easy to excuse the same boast, when it is made by dullards of middle age, who, in the act of extolling democracy and atheism, hasten to guard their pockets by explaining that their philanthropy is merely vicarious.

Of the new theories which perplex our land, none is advocated more fiercely than the theory of speed. The whole ingenuity of mankind is spent in the enterprise of moving us as quickly as possible from one place to another. We are obsessed by that form of laborious idleness which America describes as 'hustle.' We have made the means of progress, which should be our slaves, our insolent masters. We are overlooking the plainest of all truths, that it matters not a jot how we travel from York to London. It matters supremely what we do when we get there.

In an orgy of movement we neglect the sane lessons of experience, which are of far higher import than

‘ this strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims.’

Meanwhile the triumph of mechanical ingenuity blinds us to the many miracles which are about us. We refuse to believe what should be obvious, that the simple life of man is far more wonderful than the cunning artifice of a flying machine. Thus we confuse the values of things, and forget that nothing great was ever achieved save in solitude and tranquillity.

The age which delights in excess, which tests merit by advertisement, which puts faith in the sanctity of a broken record, holds great men in a paradoxical horror. Above all it hates leadership, because in his democratic envy each man would see himself king over others. So it is that force of character, grandeur of mind have fallen under the general suspicion. Education

is contemned, if it be not reduced to the level of the board-school. And the noble ideal, held up to us for our respect, is that the world of knowledge should be converted into a Trade Union, wherein the fool sets the pace, and the wise man must be restrained, lest he should outstrip the numerically omnipotent rabble.

Happily the revision of ancient gospels is as vain as the quest of new theories. The triumph of materialism is soon overpast. We are born into a world hoary with age. We inherit the beliefs, the ambitions, the prejudices of many centuries. He, who attempts to solve the problems which confront him, by first principles, must sooner or later be overtaken by disaster. The world is no vacuum, in which experiments may be made without danger. The country which encourages the apostles of false progress pays the debt of its recklessness to the uttermost farthing. The wisdom of one generation must ever be

accounted folly, compared with the wisdom of all time. Even now you may detect the signals of a coming reaction. Some there remain who interpret, justly, the duty of light-bearers, and who will hand on to their successors the lamps, wisely trimmed and tended, which they have received from those who went before. And with their aid once again these truths shall emerge, that the secret of the present, the hope of the future, reside in the past, that the only thread, which can guide us through the labyrinth of this life, is the golden thread of tradition.

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LETTERS OF AN ENGLISHMAN

I

‘CULTIVATE YOUR GARDEN’

POLITICS, once said a distinguished statesman, touch only the fringe of life. Beyond the hustings lie many activities, many hopes. In the wide fields of thought and art there are still lost causes to be upheld, there are still hazardous victories to be won. And if we except the honourable and paramount duty of defence—defence of the Empire, defence of the Constitution—there is little indeed that politics can accomplish.

Each man must save his own soul and guard his own intelligence for himself. The dream of perfectibility, of which sanguine Radicals tell us, is a dream and no more. It is not by Acts of Parliament, but by our own resolution, that we are made happier

and better. The world has not, and never had, any assured hope of progress, a wayward thing, which, if she condescend to smile, revivifies all about her, but which the wisest politician that ever lived may not coerce.

Thus it is not upon argument or theory that a community may be firmly based. 'Nature nor the engagement of words,' says Bacon, 'are not so forcible as customs.' Custom and belief, in truth, are the most stable elements of our human life, and he, who, through the medium of politics, would do them violence, proves that he is incompetent to rule either others or himself. It is no less impious to disregard the established order than to enter into a conflict with Nature, and the best way to serve a country is quietly to respect her traditions.

But, if for a while we forget politics, if we confess that laws are powerless suddenly to convert mankind, we shall understand how greatly it profits us to improve our environment. 'We must cultivate our garden,' said Voltaire's *Candide*, and no

philosopher ever gave a wiser counsel. That is to say, we must do our own work, and turn the light of knowledge upon our own hearts. We must regenerate ourselves before we hope to regenerate others. We must trim our own hedge, we must cut our own lawn, we must grow our own flowers, before we impose our laws of agriculture upon the community; and if only the whole world had taken to itself this prudent advice—‘Cultivate your garden’—how pleasant a place it would have been wherein to dwell!

That the present age has been an age of political restlessness is not a sign of wisdom or energy. He who is engrossed in politics begins the work of intelligence at the wrong end. Let him first make sure the rudiments of knowledge, and all things may be added unto him. After all, a community is but a sum of individuals, and that community will be best able to defend itself, whose individuals have turned their understanding to the sternest account. After the defeat of 1870, a company of

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French writers were discussing the causes of their national failure. 'We have been conquered,' said Renan, 'because we have neglected the teaching of German philosophy.' If these words may not be accepted literally, there is a profound truth underlying them which Englishmen would do well to take to heart.

For no nation will ever keep its supremacy, which does not scrupulously castigate its taste, and revise its canons of criticism. Political excellence may not be put on or off as a garment. It comes only from a proper appreciation of life and the arts. We need not set about this appreciation in the spirit of priggishness or superiority. We must not follow false 'culture' as a will-o'-the-wisp. But, if we are to survive as a great people, we can do no less than ask if the life, the plays, the books, the pictures of our choice are worthy the admiration that we lavish upon them.

At the outset one exception must be made. Against those who can feel no interest in the things of the mind not a

word of reproach should be uttered. No interest is far better than an interest which is not sincere. The intelligence that is unblotted, like a blank page, may presently have the truths of all time inscribed upon it. The vanity, which affects a knowledge which it has not, deserves neither help nor commiseration. But from those, who assume the leadership of the people, we have a right to demand some understanding of the arts which embellish life, of the thoughts which bind together the present and the past.

How is this demand fulfilled ? We have a stage, which is an anodyne and no more, and which neither France nor Germany would tolerate for a month. Men and women pack our theatres not for any artistic pleasure, which they may obtain, but for the indulgence of primitive emotions or the satisfaction of an imperfect sense of humour. If they see a fool grin through a horse-collar, or witness the antics of a knockabout *artiste*, they experience such a thrill as can be equalled only by the dis-

comfiture of a pasteboard villain. And the most of men demand of books the same qualities as they demand of the theatre. They are imbecile, not vicious, in their taste. Their favourite stories correspond to an inherent weakness in their nature, and it is impossible to contemplate the prevailing love of farce or melodrama, of foolish fiction, or of the painted anecdotes which tempt the middle classes within the doors of the Royal Academy, without recognising that something is wanting in our national intelligence, that our standards of artistic right and wrong are pitifully debased.

Nor can we blind our eyes to the fact that these debased standards of taste profoundly affect the common weal. The lessons of history cannot be gainsaid. The times of triumphing intelligence have been the times also of political energy and courage. The age of Elizabeth was the age of the Armada. Drake and Shakespeare lived at the same period and under the same sky. The Englishmen who delighted in our

golden drama were the same men, who beat the Spaniard and ransacked the Americas in search of treasure and adventure. So was it when England, with a supreme effort, crushed the power of Napoleon. William Pitt and the romantic revival grew up side by side. The pomp of Wordsworth, the chivalry of Scott, the high romance of Coleridge, matched in their sphere the lofty aims of Pitt, the splendid courage of Nelson and Wellington. What, then, remains for us to do that we may strengthen our national defences and revive the pride, which once was ours in arts and arms, in poetry and statecraft? Men of genius are beyond the reach of our command. They are born to the world in happy moments; they come and go as they list; they do their deeds and make their songs naturally, as the birds sing. We cannot tell the time of their coming, nor call them to our aid. The most that we can do—and that is much—is to recognise them when they come. For the rest we can revise our methods of criticism,

we can learn to reject what is base and foolish, we can see to it that we do not accept a merely popular success as a first proof of merit. And thus shall we bring intelligence to the help of policy.

Politics touch the fringe of life. If we make ourselves better fitted to guard that fringe, it will not be in vain that, cultivating our garden, we neglect for a while the ampler, busier spaces of the world.

II

THE 'HALF-BAKED'

ENGLAND to-day is the paradise of the 'half-baked.' Though we speak familiarly of the 'super-man,' the one object of our policy is to encourage his opposite. We do our best to level all men down. To compel the unfit to survive, we employ the vast resources of modern science. We profess so firm a faith in the efficacy of education that, if a boy proves himself incapable of learning anything, we punish him by keeping him at school longer than his fellows. And, when he is old enough to vote, we hail him obsequiously as the last repository of wisdom.

It is no wonder, then, that they who know not how to hold them would grasp the reins of power. It is no wonder that taste and knowledge are affected by the

very men who do not understand their meaning. A sanguine temper and a good intention seem to the 'half-baked' the only essentials of leadership. Without a knowledge of the past or insight into the future, they deem themselves fit for any enterprise because their ears have been tickled by loose talk concerning the people. And in their vanity they forget that failure is criminal. 'Men little think,' wrote Burke, 'how immorally they act in rashly meddling with what they do not understand. Their delusive good intention is no sort of excuse for their presumption. Those who truly mean well must be fearful of acting ill.' These words should be written in letters of gold upon every public building. If only they were taken to heart, the world would be spared a great deal of misery and bloodshed.

They are not taken to heart, and we are compelled to see our Empire endangered that the pride of travelling members of Parliament be not affronted. The encouragement, which has been given

by Mr. Keir Hardie and his friends to those who, unable to govern themselves, are unwilling that others should govern, has supported a purposeless sedition in India and in Egypt. Had these ingenious Socialists studied the delicate affairs, upon which they pretend to adjudicate, they would have realised that something more than first principles is necessary for the administration of great dependencies, that you cannot stem the tide of rebellion with a copy-book heading.

However, we owe it to the intervention of Mr. H. G. Wells that we are permitted to look upon the full-length portrait of a 'half-baked' man. George Meek,¹ who for some twenty years has drawn a bath chair at Eastbourne, is in all respects typical of his class. He is curious, sanguine, and an egoist. It is evident that he believes himself entrusted by Providence with special talents, and he is quick to ascribe what seems to him the failure of those

¹ *George Meek, Bath-Chairman.* By Himself. With an Introduction by H. G. Wells. London: Constable and Co.

talents not to his own lack of concentration, but to the political system under which he lives. He is, therefore, a Socialist, and an apostle of 'divine discontent.' He complains that he has had to 'struggle in an environment of din, squalor, and vice.' And yet to read his book is to understand why it was impossible that he should ever have emerged by his own effort into a cleaner, quieter atmosphere.

For George Meek is but another victim of that half-knowledge, which is far more disastrous than ignorance. Though he seems to Mr. Wells a miracle of life, he is merely the product of a false system of education. He was nurtured upon wood pulp and printer's ink. If he had never entered a free library, how vastly happier he would have been! His outlook upon life, his political opinions, are all borrowed from printed books. He has fed his mind upon an unnutritious diet from the beginning. When he ought to feel with absolute sincerity he falls back upon some hackneyed phrase. The words of others

have so profound an influence upon him that he contradicts the whole intention of his book. ' We attach a great deal too much importance to our individualities,' says he on one page, forgetting that his one purpose in life is to foster his own individuality upon the thoughts of others. ' My nature is so complex,' he tells us on another page, and perhaps, if he had not devoted his leisure to the study of all the classics, he would have been able to plumb the depth of his mistake.

This, in truth, is the tragedy of George Meek and many hundreds of his kind. They believe that they are unique in the experience of the world, and their capacity cannot keep pace with their aspiration. If only they did their work and left literature to others, they would be wiser as well as happier. It is far better to have an intimate knowledge of bath chairs than to have a nodding acquaintance with a translation of Homer. When George Meek discusses literature, as he does on every page of his book, he discusses it in the same

reckless fashion with which Mr. Keir Hardie discusses foreign policy. Words flow from his pen which have not the remotest touch with his brain. He feels that he must achieve a literary allusion at all costs. The fact that his father and his uncle married sisters recalls the Atridæ to his mind, and convinces you at once that he lacks the gifts of imagery and observation. Even when he makes love the habit of print is heavy upon him. He must needs woo the lady not with apples but with *Clarions* and verses from Omar.

His criticisms of literature are what we should expect, and are given with an air of finality. I wonder what Mr. Meek would say, if a mere man of letters discoursed to him concerning the proper conduct of bath chairs? But at any rate Mr. Meek has no fear. He has read Shakespeare's plays three or four times, but 'for the life of him cannot see what there is so out of the way wonderful about him.' He would not. He prefers Homer. I remember another Mr. Meek who thought Homer hopelessly

inferior to Ossian, because he did not understand 'nature,' and one pronouncement is as valuable as the other. Then Mr. Meek 'cannot stand Scott or Thackeray anyhow.' George Eliot and Mrs. Humphry Ward are more to his taste. For him, indeed, reading is a grave and serious task. He is sick of politics. He just busies himself in the books he is reading—'Brown-ing, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, Lucretius.' What a list ! The most highly trained intellect would suffer from congestion if it fed upon such food as this, and I tremble to think what effect this classical orgy has had upon the mind of Meek.

George Meek himself need not surprise us. He is, as I have said, the victim of a foolish system, and may often be met with in this world, where reading and writing come by Act of Parliament, and where very few are fortunate enough to escape the free library. What is surprising is Mr. Wells's attitude towards George Meek. Now Mr. Wells tells us in his preface that he 'hates all idealisation,' and he does not see that

Meek has idealised himself from the first page to the last. Mr. Wells does not like sentimentality. Meek is so severely sentimental that he looks upon life through the sentiment of others. He illustrates those things, which come to him, not from his own experience but from popular novels, and so enwraps his book in a thick air of unreality. Never does he attain that sincerity, which is born of understanding and concentration. When the cobbler told Apelles that a shoe in his picture wanted a latchet, Apelles listened to his counsel with respect. When the cobbler proceeded to criticise a leg, the painter sent him back to his last.

‘What are we to do with our Meeks?’ asks Mr. Wells in a kind of despair. Why should we do anything with them? Why should they do anything with us? But, if we must interfere in the business of their lives, let us try to convince them that half-knowledge is as worthless as well as a dangerous thing; that the dilettante, no matter to what class he belong, can expect nothing in this life save disappointment.

III

OF GREAT MEN

WHEN Mr. Roosevelt, in a speech delivered at Oxford during his famous tour of words, sought for biological analogies in history, he was guilty of a wilful confusion. Between history and biology there is no link, save the link of metaphor. To indulge our fancy, we may illustrate the life of men by the life of beasts, we may detect what looks like a common process in the evolution of species and in the history of human societies. But we speak only in imagery. Mankind is separated from other animals by the very gifts and qualities, to which it owes its character and its activities.

In the first place mankind is touched in all that it says and does by the influence of recorded speech. There is set before it the example of all the ages. The poets that

sang two thousand years ago still sing to-day. Sophocles is a living inspiration. There is neither statesman nor soldier worthy to follow his craft, who does not feel the prick of emulation, when he reads the records of the past. Thus in the realm of mankind the memory of what has been shapes what is. It is not only through our blood that we inherit the courage of our ancestors. The lessons which they taught endure for ever in the printed page.

And there is another profound difference between man and other animals. Societies do not rise and fall as species evolve by natural processes. They are checked or advanced by great men. In human development the great man is supreme. The mass is moulded by his will or fired by his ambition. When we speak of the decay of nations, we record only the fact that they have lost their leaders, or that their neighbours have been taught by genius a nobler, wiser lesson of life. Mighty heroisms are the work not of men but of man. It was Cæsar, not Rome, who conquered Gaul.

Hamlet was written by Shakespeare, not by the general energy of his contemporaries. Rembrandt put his golden visions upon canvas, not because he was born at the time of Dutch supremacy, but because he was Rembrandt.

For this reason, then, biological analogies must always be imperfect and misleading. As we look back into the past we discern nothing but a series of individual triumphs. We remember great names and high achievements. Fame, like the courage which begets it, must ever be solitary. It is in solitude that noble schemes are conceived, noble works written. What are our own annals but the annals of mighty kings and great captains, of lofty poets and profound philosophers? William I., and he alone, conquered England. The invader, who sent back his ships because if he won his battles he would not need them, and if he lost he would leave his bones on a foreign shore, was born to change the destiny of the world. How different would have been the fate of England had it not

been for our great monarchs, Henry II., Edward I., and Elizabeth ! And would not the face of our country have been changed, had not the despot Cromwell come to turn back the tide of revolution, and strengthen us in the enjoyment of reasonable liberty ? Thus it is that history dwells in the antipodes of science. Whatever we claim for it, whatever definition we frame for it, we must separate it always from the comparisons of biology. J. R. Green thought it the historian's duty to silence the drum and trumpet of kingship. He would show us the wrong path. For history is nothing more and nothing less than the biographies of great men.

Never was there a sterner necessity to insist upon this fact than in these days of democracy, when grandeur of any kind is a disgrace, when strength is popularly deemed a vice, and when the State looks with a haunting fear upon superiority. It is a common complaint that the age of great men is past, that the world is sunk in a slough of mediocrity. It would be

nearer the truth to admit that in the prevailing worship of numbers it is increasingly difficult for the great to emerge. There is no longer a career open to the talents, unless the talents will seize the career of revolution. None but a military tyrant would find an easy path to supremacy. And military tyrants are not often born into our drab and serious world. The France of to-day is not pre-eminent. Who would question her pre-eminence if another Napoleon arose in her midst? But he, if he came, would be forced to fight for a hearing. Truly, the old order is changed. Once the people was glad to acclaim a great man. Now the people demands itself to be flattered by its governors, and will listen to none that is not ready to bow a servile knee to its prevailing will.

As the people is slow to respect those who serve it, so it is quick to forget the benefits they confer. In our time no man has borne upon him the signs of grandeur so conspicuously as did Cecil Rhodes. His was the simplicity of the great. He valued

in himself and in others the plain things of life—work, courage, and sincerity. He was, moreover, a man of wide vision and far horizons. To him the end was clear, even when the very beginning was veiled from other men's eyes. Romance was in his blood. The schemes which he made for South Africa were grandiose and uniform. When once he had divined the future, he neither looked back nor swerved from the path. The wealth which he acquired he valued only as the instrument of his purpose. The story of his northward progress is like a fairy tale. He would pierce the Dark Continent with railways and telegraphs. He would light up its obscurities with all the resources of science. Nothing in Sir Thomas Fuller's monograph on Rhodes is more intensely characteristic than the pages, in which he sketches the hero's gradual advance. 'The railway is my right hand,' said Rhodes, 'and the telegraph my speech—my voice.' And so he conquered the desert, impatient always until he might reach Victoria Falls. 'I

should like,' he wrote, 'to have the spray of the water over the carriages.'

The strain of poetry in him did but strengthen his grasp of practical affairs. In early youth he set forth the real ambition of his life. 'I have my own views as to the future of South Africa,' said he, 'and I believe in a United States of South Africa, but as a portion of the British Empire.' To this view he was constant until the end. He regretted the mistakes, which he made in common with all great men, because they retarded his purpose. He waited eagerly for the day, when the 'idea of a lunatic' should pass into 'the idea of practical sanity.' Earnestly and without ceasing he preached the same gospel. 'I am working, I tell you,' he said again, 'not only for the union of the country, but for a union of races, and that will come when once a principle of equal rights is accepted for every civilised man south of the Zambesi.' The union has come, and they take the credit of it who most bitterly attacked Rhodes while he still dominated South

Africa. But history has a justice, of which politicians know nothing, and history will record that in 1910 the lifelong ambition of Cecil Rhodes was at last satisfied. The union of South Africa, like all great works, is essentially the work of one great man. And England in honouring his memory does honour to herself.

IV

THE 'NORMAL' THEATRE

THAT spirit of sentimentality, which we have been told is the weakest prop whereon mankind can lean, is not content to give its poor support to politics. With the pride of an Atlas balancing the world, it would hold upon its broken back the manifold activities of art and science. And the worst of it is that he, who takes sentimentality for his crutch, stumbles into a morass, where all sense of purpose and proportion is lost, and where pleasure is confused with a doubtful morality.

Nor is there any province of human energy, upon which the sentimentalist has laid more violent hands, than the province of the theatre. Mr. Granville Barker, for instance, who too often obscures his very rare gift of stage management beneath the

common ambition of the tub-thumper, has a simple faith in the mission of the stage. He deepens with controversy the impression, given by his plays, that he sees in the beautiful art of the drama a vague opportunity of doing good. He would have the actor and the dramatist share a pulpit between them. He would persuade them to think ardently of the improvement of the race. What they do and say should directly make for righteousness. In brief, Mr. Barker is a 'progressive' in art, as in politics, and he forgets that for the arts, bound as they are to the past by the indissoluble chain of tradition, progress is impossible.

It may be said in Mr. Barker's favour that he has rigorously practised what he has preached. With Mr. Shaw's aid he has evolved a kind of drama, which is no drama, whose first and last object is to talk, and which has succeeded in nothing so well as in driving sympathetic audiences into the depths of a despondent boredom. That we shall ever again see such 'plays' put

upon the stage as Mr. Barker's *Madras House* and Mr. Shaw's *Misalliance* is unlikely. Human patience shrinks from a mechanical debate repeated nightly. We cannot believe in the sincerity of a set of puppets, which mouth indiscriminately the platitudinous paradoxes of those, who pull their strings. But it is characteristic of Mr. Barker, in whom humour was never a dominant quality, that he should describe 'the movement which he is concerned to foster' as 'the normal drama.'

There is an arrogance in this claim to be 'normal' which might be pathetic, if it were not ludicrous. Only the very greatest neither transcend nor fall below the norm. Sophocles was normal, Shakespeare was normal, Molière was normal. Abnormality is the very essence of Messrs. Shaw and Barker. They are resolved to separate themselves from their predecessors, to shock the Philistine, to outrage the conventions of theatrical art. But in their quest after originality they follow the wrong path. To be eccentric is not to be original,

and enterprises are not estimable merely because they have not been attempted before.

The claim that they are normal is not the only claim, which Mr. Barker makes for the plays of himself and his school. He sees in them also an illustration of what he calls the Puritan element of drama. Here we have a clear and definite contradiction. There is, there can be, no 'Puritan element' in the theatre. Puritanism and the stage are old, irreconcilable enemies. The mere trick of mimicry, the art of personation, are, and have always been, offensive to the narrow spirit of austerity. The condemnation of Philip Stubbes, the arch-Puritan, uttered in 1583, despite its folly, might be repeated in good faith to-day by Stubbes's descendants. 'Who can call him a just man,' asks Stubbes, 'who plays the part of a dissembling hypocrite? Who can call him a straight-dealing man who playeth a cozener's trick? Away, therefore, with this so infamous an art! For go they never so brave, yet are they

counted and taken but for beggars. And is it not true? Live they not upon begging of everyone that comes? Are they not taken by the laws of the zealous for rogues and vagabonds? I speak of such as travel the countries with plays and interludes, making an occupation of it, and ought so to be punished, if they had their deserts.' Such is the unchanged, unchanging view held by the Puritans of the stage. No dramatist, no player, can find any comfort in it. And when we hear Mr. Barker applauding the Puritan element of his craft, we understand how far he has strayed from his right profession, that the pulpit and not the stage is his proper place. With the best will in the world, he will never make them concordant.

However, Mr. Barker is not wholly optimistic. He sees clearly enough, as well he might, that the theatre is beset with many sins. What hope is there for a country, which accepts musical comedy as something better than a money-making machine, which, even at its best, is content

to speak a dialect which bears no relationship to the language of literature, and which at all times would flatter the eye rather than the mind? Mr. Barker detects in himself and his friends the best hope of regeneration. I would that I shared his sanguine temper. In the meantime, like a true 'progressive,' he is as ready with his remedies as a quack with his medicines. He demands, first of all, the abolition of the censorship in the name of Puritanism—a paradox, truly, whose absurdity the patient investigation of a Committee of both Houses has abundantly demonstrated.

For all the other ills, to which the stage is subject, Mr. Barker would prescribe a national theatre, and the fact that he prescribes it is one of the many strong arguments that can be adduced against it. A national theatre has, of itself, no merit. It will prosper or fail according as we have good or evil things to put in it. The house of Molière has been a triumphant success, because it was the home of whatever was best in the twin arts of acting and the

drama. It enshrined a tradition, which it has piously cherished for more than two centuries. Mr. Barker would set the cart before the horse. Having no school of acting, we should, if we followed his suggestion, establish a national theatre upon nothing, and then hope for the best. What Mr. Barker would do with it we know well enough. He would dedicate it to the production of 'normal plays'; he would bid it ring with the eloquence of discourse; he would darken it with the tedium of superfluous debates.

The longest discourses, the most earnest theories, cannot change the truth that the theatre is a pleasure-house. We go there for our delight, to indulge our sense of art, not to pick up the lessons of a trite morality. Mr. Barker, indeed, is as far from the artistry of the stage as the purveyor of musical comedy. We prize the inapposite preacher as little as we prize the antic buffoon. We refuse to put new duties upon the theatre at the bidding of 'progress.' The drama must grow in accord

with its history and its traditions. It can achieve success only by the wise treatment of its materials. It must forget the lesson taught industriously for half a misguided century that it is nothing better than a clothes-peg. Four trestles, four boards, two actors, and a passion may still suffice for our pleasure. There is still an exquisite beauty in perfect diction, in words written by a poet, not to be read, but to be heard. Here, then, is the dramatist's path of safety—to follow always the behests of his art, and to remember that he is at his worst when he tries most zealously to 'do good.'

V

CELTIC GLAMOUR

OF late years we have heard much eloquent speech concerning the glamour of the Celts. Whatever is rare and noble in the English character—imagination, courage, wit, and humour—has been amiably ascribed to a secret, mysterious influence called Celtic. Should any hero be brave enough to leave the well-worn track, in life or letters, he is instantly hailed as of Celtic origin. Many years ago, when the artist of ‘The Briar Rose’ was still among us, one of the elect, who inaugurated this strange cult, took a public delight in the reflection that ‘the greatest living painter bore the good old Celtic name of Jones.’ And as the word ‘Celt’ has stood for every kind of genius, so it has been assumed to imply all generous extravagance of thought or speech.

When Mr. Lloyd George strays to Limehouse, and with a flood of eloquence pours obloquy upon a very respectable class, he is easily excused on the mere ground of Celtic fervour. It is in the same spirit that those corners of Great Britain, which obstinately return Radical members of Parliament, are said to belong to the Celtic fringe. In brief, the word 'Celtic' has become for many a mere expletive of applause. It is the converse of that homely dissyllable, which is heard from the lips of the British working-man at every street corner. And the one word has just as much, and just as little, meaning as the other.

A strong feeling of race underlies the Celtic superstition, and it is therefore unfortunate that the adroit champions of the Celts have not been at the pains to discover who and what these benefactors of humankind really were. The champions too easily descried in them a pure reflection of themselves. They imagined a race, such as they thought their own to be, of small, dark men, ardent and im-

pulsive. They saw epitomised in them all the virtues of humankind. And in constant opposition they pictured a tribe of large, sluggish, foolish persons, who had usurped a power which they knew not how to wield, and who regarded with an unsympathetic contempt all differing from them in type and temper. It was a pleasant theory of life, and soothing to the pride of those, who put it forward. One fatal objection should hinder its acceptance: it finds no jot of support in the history of Europe.

The Celts are in no sense secret or mysterious. They were a race of men perfectly familiar to the ancients. Julius Cæsar himself has left us a clear record of their characteristics. The pure Celt was a man of large stature, with fair hair and blue eyes. He was of a dominant spirit, and was always seeking an outlet for his energies in the discovery of new lands and fresh pastures. He travelled south and east. He peopled France. In Cæsar's time he was to be found in Britain. But, like

many another masterful man—like the Norman in Ireland, for instance—he presently died out or became merged in the race which he had conquered. What he was then, and what he did, the anthropologists have revealed. He was neither dark nor small; and for the heroes of the Radical Press we must find a new name, a new race. Nor need there be much doubt concerning their origin. They are, indeed, still ‘the shy traffickers, the dark Iberians,’ for whom on the beach Matthew Arnold’s grave Tyrian trader ‘undid his corded bales.’

Shy traffickers they were then; shy traffickers they are to-day. And in their Iberian blood they have preserved the faiths and fancies of the ancient world. That they are not always eager to fight the common battle of life is at once their genius and their charm. That some of them disdain the success, which seems essential to their practical neighbours, is their good fortune and part of the strength of Great Britain. But they are not the only strength, the only genius of England.

Matthew Arnold, who described them marvellously well in his verse, did more in his prose than any other writer to obscure the truth. He may even be called the begetter of the Celtic superstition. For having named them Celts, who are not, he proceeded to use the word 'Celtic' as a stick wherewith to castigate our English pride. He invented a character of dull energy, which he dubbed English, and whenever he detected any other quality in an Englishman, he declared that it was 'not English,' and must be tracked down to the influence of a Celtic ancestor.

Now, this method of reasoning is the most dangerous of all methods. There is no excuse for inventing an imaginary standard, and then excluding all who do not seem to conform to it. This is the method of Procrustes, who stretched those, who were too short, and lopped those who were too long for the compass of his tyrannical bed. If you would arrive at a character of the English you may do so only by a wide and honest comparison of Englishmen.

From this comparison it would be manifestly unfair to exclude the great masters of deed and speech. When Matthew Arnold declares that Shakespeare's 'openness and flexibility of spirit' are not English, that Addison's 'moderation and delicacy' are not English, the best answer is that these qualities are English, precisely because Shakespeare and Addison, with others of their compatriots, possessed them.

We all know that the English nation is inextricably composed of many foreign, even discordant, elements. To this variety of origin it owes its strength and intelligence. The result of the amalgam is an Englishman, and it is only a part of our conspiracy to underrate our country that the word 'Celtic' has so long been used as a kind of scourge. The argument would be baseless, even if all the literary genius of England were found in what we may call the Iberian fringe. It is not found in this fringe. Shakespeare, our peculiar glory, came from the heart of England. And the Iberians, who protest that he was

a Celt, are as far from the truth as the German professors, who asseverate that he was an estrayed Teuton. Chaucer and Milton acknowledged London for their home. The splendour of their achievement is shared by the whole of Britain, and England shall not be deprived of their grandeur at the bidding of a philosopher, who composed a work concerning Celtic literature, and troubled not to discover who were the Celts and whence they came.

So deeply has this poison of contempt for their own country permeated the veins of some Englishmen that in an essay once published by an ardent member of Parliament the great men of our country were rigidly excluded from consideration as the mere accidents of chance. Shelley and Nelson were boldly added to the list of those who were 'un-English.' If the writer meant they were un-English, in the sense that they differ from the average citizen, he might claim some sense for his argument. The truth is, all great men, whether French or English,

Russian or Italian, surpass the average. That is the essence of grandeur. They are not un-English or un-French because they surpass it. And we alone of all peoples employ our ingenuity to explain away, by some tortuous theory of race, what should be our pride. We do not hear of Frenchmen, who declare that Molière was un-French. The Russians take delight in the genius of Dostoievsky and Tolstoi without arguing that they possess gifts, to which their nationality does not entitle them. Yet no country has a better right to boast of her men of genius than England. In oratory, as in poetry, she alone can match the mastery of Greece. She has held her own in statesmanship as on the field of battle. And we shall show a better sense of patriotism, if we accept in proud humility the grandeur of our country, and waste no ingenuity in inquiring fruitlessly whether this triumph or that of style or of courage was attained by the fair-haired, blue-eyed Celt, or by the shy trafficker, the dark Iberian, his friendly rival in arms and arts.

VI

THE GAMBLE OF LIFE

IT is the tendency of the present age to leave nothing to the gamble of life. Our rulers profess a simple and touching faith in the efficacy of legislation. The active philanthropist is sure that, if only his opinions are put upon paper and drafted into an Act of Parliament, the State will be saved. The people, whose sacred will, we are told, shall always and in all places prevail, may not be trusted to govern its own household or to educate its own children. The Government's inspector must follow it assiduously from the cradle to the grave. Only the type and character of our citizens have hitherto been the offspring of chance, and, if a law placed upon the Statute Book can eliminate this chance, Englishmen will not be permitted in the

future to assume any character or type, that is not imposed upon them by Act of Parliament.

Unhappily, some ingenious person has whispered the word 'heredity' into the ears of hopeful legislators, and the path to wisdom and sobriety lies clear before them. They will carry the responsibility, which they pretend for the welfare of the children, fed, clothed, and educated at the public expense, a step farther back. They will control their breed ; they will see to it that they come of sturdy, sober parents ; in brief, they will conclude a 'full dress debate' in the House of Commons with a benevolent Bill, and henceforth there shall be no weaklings born in the British Isles.

It is the men of science who have shown the way. Mendelism, the last favourite of learning, will lead, we are told, straight to the millennium. Now the importance of Mendel's discovery cannot be overrated. It did something more than prove why the dwarf pea, half-bred of a tall ancestor,

breeds true to dwarfness. It enabled the horticulturist to 'fix the type.' By its aid the offspring of rusty wheat has been taught to resist disease. But with these triumphs Mendelians are not content. As they have conquered the flowers of the field, so they would conquer the whole realm of nature. They would even lay their cold and scientific hands upon the race of men. As forty years ago Huxley and Tyndall, travelling beyond their sphere, would improve the morals of men as well as enlighten their minds, so the Mendelians, tired of their gardens, bright with sweet peas, would fix the type of human kind. Better teaching and better sanitation, says one of the most distinguished of their number, are but palliatives. 'Education is to the man what manure is to the pea.' The man is all the better for it; the son profits not a jot by his father's learning. If the progress of the race is to be permanent, it must depend not upon education but upon breeding. Mendelism, in short, must come to the rescue.

A pleasant dream, truly, of human perfectibility ! And what a chance for the fashionable bureaucracy ! We can imagine a new Department, presided over by an intelligent Minister, guarding assiduously the Temple of Marriage. The Minister will be aided in his pious endeavours by a band of bright young Mendelians as numerous and as comfortably paid as Mr. Lloyd George's valuers. He will endow maternity, on the stern condition that the women of England mate as he tells them. And thus, by treating men and women as sweet peas, he will presently be able to ' fix the type.' In other words, he will make precisely the kind of voter that he wants, and as, of course, this Minister of ours will be a sound Radical, our fancy easily depicts the kind of type at which his ambition will aim. It will be a man, restless, questioning, eager for change, whose sanguine eye looks out upon reform from beneath a lofty, polished forehead. And when this estimable being, like the dwarf pea (*Pisum sativum*), always breeds true, then the

victory of Radicalism will be complete. Elections will become a farce, and the Whigs will be tenants of our Government, not for life, but for eternity.

Only one danger would threaten these political Mendelians. For the 'fixation of type' several generations are necessary, and, were the Radical supremacy untimely disturbed, the excellent work which they had accomplished might be suddenly undone. A Tory Minister might be resolved upon another type. He might see in the sanguine hero of his opponent a constant menace to the State, and where the Radical had insisted upon 'the recessive dwarf' he might prefer 'the dominant tall.' And thus by one ill-omened decision the work of years might be destroyed, and the English race might presently revert to the unclassified good and evil, which dominated England before the coming of Mendelism.

It is but a dream. And, if for a moment we regard seriously the ambition of those who would apply to the human race the

methods of the back garden, it is because a professor of biology has shown us the way. The objections to the plan are many and insuperable. Even if a tyrannical Government decreed to make experiments in compulsory marriages, several generations must live and die, as I have said, before the results were made manifest. And the type of patience, which would leave to posterity the profit of its self-denial, has not been and never will be fixed. Our inclinations are still our own. We shall delight in or suffer by them, as destiny decrees, with a good heart and without complaint. Nor shall we ever leave to a Mendelian Government the intimate duty of refusal and selection.

In brief, men and women are not peas, either sweet or edible. The complexity of their nature is such as to defy the wisdom of the most profoundly erudite and benevolent despot. We carry in us the seed of all our ancestors. The unions, which seem to promise best for the benefit of the world, are too often the bitterest disappointments. When, in Shakespeare's play,

Henry v. was to espouse Katharine of France, he imagined a son who should go to Constantinople, and take the Turk by the beard. And fate gave them Henry vi., a gentle, studious monarch, who founded colleges, and was driven to the battlefield in his own despite. Then in a country rectory is born the hero of Trafalgar, who, with the courage of genius, destroys the French fleet and changes the history of his country. Truly, heredity is supreme over all, but it is a mystery which the mind of man cannot pierce, a force which human ingenuity cannot control.

Nor, we hope, would human ingenuity control it even if it could. There is no ambition, which the wise should less willingly cherish, than the ambition to 'fix the type' of human kind. The very essence of its strength and beauty is individuality, which is divergence. Equality is a nightmare, which haunts us only in our moments of acutest misery. And no better method of attaining it has yet been suggested than the method of a bureau-

cracy, which in the interest of sanity and strength should interfere, if it could, with the natural, unseen laws of heredity. How should its knowledge ever be sufficient ?

There remains the gamble of life, infinitely preferable to the tinkerings of science. It may give us here and there, the criminal and the drunkard. What matters it, when it gives us also the man of genius ? Gladly, in the hope of the profit, will we face the loss, content only if the highest achievement of the race be not a foolish mediocrity. And as for law and the sciences, let them remain secure within their own provinces, and may their professors remember that, as no man was ever made wise by Act of Parliament, so science best regards its own end when it is content to deal with facts and to leave ' brilliant generalisations ' to the charlatan.

VII

THE END OF THE PRIZE RING

THE extravagant burlesque of an ancient prize fight enacted in America, when Johnson and Jeffries met, does not reflect, even dimly, the glories of our English ring. An orgy of greed and arrogance, it displayed all those qualities, which the bruisers of England most heartily despised. The heroes, for whom a purse of twenty-five golden guineas was sufficient reward, put their honour before their profit, and were content if they might retire, when hand and eye had lost their speed, to the voluble comfort of a public-house. Were Cribb and Belcher, Randall and Tom Spring permitted to revisit the upper air, what would they think of the eager speculation to which Johnson and Jeffries have willingly surrendered? The prize money, which

a hundred of them could not bear away, the rights in 'moving pictures,' the blatant appearances at music halls—these were the true excuse and purpose of the spectacle in California. And we can but vaguely surmise in what terms they would have been described by the pugilists of old, who pitched their stakes and roped their rings in the fair meadows of England.

The passion for dollars, in exchange for which black man and white sold their valour, is not pleasant to contemplate. Far more distasteful is the spirit of arrogance, in which the whole contest was enwrapped. Both men were brave and noisy with their tongues, though they followed a craft, which, above all, enjoins silence. For many weeks they boasted of their prowess in the Press. Jeffries pronounced himself the champion of the white race, and deemed it not effrontery to assume, unasked, so tremendous a responsibility. Johnson of the golden teeth, in happy nonchalance, was sure that he is the greatest man on earth,

and chattered of his strength and courage even in the ring. Now the true hero prefers deeds to words, and the vanity of the American bruisers is the measure of their degeneracy. When, nearly a century ago, Hazlitt went down by the Bath Mail to see Bill Neate face the Gasman he was inspired to a gentle homily. 'Modesty,' said he, 'should accompany the fancy as its shadow. The best men were always the best behaved. Jem Belcher, the Game Chicken, were civil, silent men. So is Cribb, so is Tom Belcher, the most elegant of sparrers, and not a man for everyone to take by the nose.' Johnson and Jeffries erred on the side neither of silence nor civility, and it would be a shame upon the past to permit their names to stand in the roll of fame.

The art and science of self-defence are one of the many links, which bind ancient Greece and modern England. On the banks of the Ilissus, as on the banks of the Thames, the golden crown was won by fisticuffs. And in Greece, as in

England, poets celebrated the ring in immortal verse, historians recorded the triumphs of their champions in lofty prose. If Pindar has the best of it in verse, the English writers of prose are infinitely superior to the discreet Pausanias and the other Greeks, who reported the brave deeds of triumphing athletes. And there was a good reason for our superiority. For fifty years the prize ring was an intimate part of English life and English literature. The 'Flights of the Fancy' aroused a universal enthusiasm, in which the sordid element of money claimed no part. There were no large gates, there were no heavy purses. England looked with pride upon her bruisers, because they were living examples of fair play and physical endurance. Such men as Belcher and Cribb, Spring and Painter and Oliver became national heroes, whose courage and restraint were held up to the young as models worthy of imitation. When Wellington declared that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields

of Eton, he referred, of course, to the fights which there took place with the bare knuckles, and it was generally believed, not without reason, that it was the spirit fostered by the ring which enabled England to persist victoriously in the war with France. Borrow, deploring in 1851 the death of pugilism, assigned his sorrow to its proper cause. 'All I have to say is,'—thus he wrote—'that the French still live on the other side of the water, and are still casting their eyes hitherward.'

Thus pugilism grew into a sport, in which all classes of society professed an interest. Poets and soldiers, bishops and statesmen were not ashamed to be seen at the ring-side. Keats himself, who tolerated nothing that was ugly, witnessed the famous fight which took place on Crawley Down between Randall and Turner. And John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats's friend, celebrated the skill and courage of the victor, Randall, the famous Nonpareil, in an imperishable sonnet. 'Good with both hands, and only ten stone four.' You will seek in vain a

nobler tribute than this to an unvanquished hero.

And who does not remember Byron's friendship for his 'corporeal pastor and master,' John Jackson? Or the interest which the Iron Duke and Lord Grey, Castle-reagh and Windham took in the art of self-defence? The oratory of the early nineteenth century is eloquent with pugilistic metaphor, and the actors went to the same school as the orators, with even better results. The compliment which Kean paid the ring is the highest of all. 'When Mr. Kean'—it is Hazlitt who writes—'was so much praised for the action of Richard, where he stands, after his sword is wrested from him, with his hands stretched out, "as if his will could not be disarmed, and the very phantoms of his despair had withering power," he said he borrowed it from seeing the last efforts of Painter in his fight with Oliver.' The rhapsodists, in prose and verse, followed the same path as the actors. After Hazlitt came Borrow, whose eulogy of Tom Spring is familiar to all:

‘Hail to thee, six-foot Englishman of the brown eye, worthy to have carried a six-foot bow at Flodden.’ That is the proper spirit of adulation, nor is it excessive. Who will deny Tom Spring a place in the great line of tradition ?

The pitiful exhibition of rancour and vulgarity, made in America, will not find its rhapsodist. No Hazlitt, no Borrow will celebrate a battle, which was witnessed by none that had not first been searched, lest perchance he carried in his pocket a missile of death. This negation of sport will tempt only to farce or satire. The contest was never for a moment a living contest. It was brought about only by vaunting advertisement. And the one lesson that it taught is that the time and season for pugilism are gone, like the flower of the grass, and will not come again into the world.

In brief, the prize ring is dead—and it is as well. The real battles of the future will not be battles of brute force and hand-to-hand encounter. They will not be inspired

to victory by the spirit of the ring. The understanding of firearms, the scientific management of machinery, which they demand, will not be bettered by a knowledge of fisticuffs. War and athleticism are for ever divorced. The mob of be-capped spectators, who shout themselves hoarse at football matches, will always be useless for defence until they are compelled to undergo the training, which they regard as below the dignity of freeborn voters. To-day we need soldiers, not sportsmen, if we are to survive in the competition of nations. Euripides set the truth to the music of his verse two thousand years ago :

Will they meet in fight with quoits in hand,
Or in the press of shields drive forth the foeman
By force of fisticuffs from hearth and home ?
Such follies are forgotten face to face
With steel.

Indeed they are, and we may contemplate the final extinction of pugilism with equanimity.

VIII

‘ STRAITENED CIRCUMSTANCES ’

‘ HE who gives quickly gives twice,’ says the old proverb, to which might be added as a corollary : ‘ He who gives ungraciously gives not at all.’ And it is in a spirit of ungraciousness that the British Government interprets its obligation of generosity. The list of pensions, granted year by year to distinguished men, their widows, and their daughters reminds us that the Treasury is determined to render its favours, which are none too great, as humiliating as possible. Beggars, alas ! cannot be choosers. They must take the kicks with the ha’pence, and pocket the affront imposed by a penurious Government with what cheerfulness they can command.

The sum usually set aside for those who have served their country in peace and

war, or have benefited their kind by the profitless crafts of art, science, and literature, amounts to no more than £25,000. Compared with what is lavished on old-age pensions, this sum is pitifully insignificant. It measures the democracy's contempt for the class, whose talents it employs, and which cannot organise itself at the polls. But it is not the insignificance of the rewards upon which I desire to comment; it is upon the lack of grace, with which they are made. To the pittance that is awarded to the widows and daughters of those, who have spent themselves in the public service, there is attached a meaningless and superfluous insult. It is made quite clear that honour and distinction are not of themselves deserving of reward. It is poverty, which moves the State to an act of justice. The terms of affront are not always the same. There was a time when the Treasury justified its munificence by the 'destitute condition' of its pensioners. To-day it excuses itself to the democracy for rewarding merit by citing

the ‘straitsened circumstances’ or the ‘inadequate means of support’ of those, who receive its bounty.

The affront is wholly superfluous, whatever form it assumes. We may take it that those who apply for pensions are not affluent. The mere acceptance of an annuity implies the absence of wealth. In most cases the ‘straitsened circumstances’ are the necessary outcome of sacrifices made by those, on whom the victims of necessity were dependent. The servant of the State devotes himself to his duty without any thought of the morrow. The man of letters, who makes pleasure for thousands, too often finds it impossible to provide for those who come after him. The single-minded enthusiast, who gives his years to the solution of a scientific problem, and thus enormously increases the sum of national wealth, the fearless discoverer, who unravels the mystery of untrodden lands and pathless seas, cannot but prefer their ultimate success to the proximate reward of money. Nor are they

blameworthy if, in the devout pursuit of their chosen end, they are unable to leave behind them a comfortable fortune. Rather they deserve whatever bounty the State can bestow upon them and their families. To such apostles of science and art the Government should give freely, not in disdain, but in all humility of spirit. It should proclaim aloud its willingness to reward distinction wherever it be found. It should severely refrain from a wanton parade of the poverty, which is the obvious misfortune of all who ask for or accept a pension. After all, is it not for distinguished service that the pensions on the Civil List are distributed? 'Straitened circumstances,' 'destitute condition,' 'inadequate means of support,' while they are not of themselves sufficient to be rewarded, are a common factor in the lives of those, who seek the aid of the State. But that is no reason why the aid should not be given in the proper terms of gratitude and respect.

An explanation is less easy, because

the insult is not invariable. Some persons there are in receipt of pensions, to whom no public slur of ‘destitution’ attaches. Though in every case, no doubt, the pension is welcome, the Treasury makes no attempt to justify the difference of its terms. It sprinkles the uncomfortable words ‘straitened circumstances’ with a careless lack of thought. In one list of annuities, for instance, we find the name of the widow of a diplomatist, who for nearly half a century was the faithful servant of his country. He held the highest offices, which the Foreign Secretary can bestow, and which bring honour rather than wealth to those who hold them. Is not his widow worthy of our gratitude in consideration of her husband’s distinguished public services? Is it necessary for the purpose of policy, or in the cause of generosity, that the whole world should be reminded superfluously of her ‘straitened circumstances’?

From one example you may learn many, and if you will consult the ‘Return of All

Persons now in Receipt of Civil List Pensions' you may estimate the grudging spirit of insult, which animates the Treasury. And it is not for nothing that the Treasury reserves its amiable allusions to straitened circumstances for what the tub-thumper calls the 'classes.' It is too good a chance of patronage for the democracy to lose. What right have soldiers or ambassadors, scholars or writers, to the consideration of the governing proletariat? They do not turn elections, or shout their political opinions from the house-tops. Still worse, they would do the work, which it has been given them to do, even if there were no hope that the 'destitute condition' of their wives and daughters would be mitigated by an indulgent Government. It is plain, therefore, that they are entitled to the respect of no true democrat, and if they eat the bread of 'charity,' let it be made as bitter to them as possible.

How different is the treatment meted out to the people! When the Old-Age Pensions Bill was introduced Ministers

insisted (rightly enough) that the feelings of the people should be tenderly respected. It was pointed out that the pension given to all, who had attained the age of seventy was not a gift, but a right. It was a reward for faithful service faithfully accomplished ; it was deferred pay ; it was anything you please but an act of charity. The inquiries into suitability were ordered to be as little irksome as possible. Above all, no word of affront might be spoken to the recipient. There was much talk in the jargon of the hustings, of refreshing fruit held to parched lips, and that was all. For the rest, the pensioners walked boldly to their post-office, conscious that they were performing an act of favour to the State.

Is it too much to ask that those, who receive pensions, not for their years, but for distinguished service, should have equal consideration shown to their feelings ? Though another interpretation has been put upon democracy, equal treatment for all should still be the essence of that form of government, lest injustice be done

to the highest in the land. Grotesque though it may seem to the hardy politician, the poet, whose immortal verse is echoed from age to age, the sculptor, whose chisel commemorates the glories of our State, the painter, who imprisons the hues of the rainbow upon his canvas, the soldier, who dies for his country, the ambassador, who defends abroad the cause of England, are entitled to the nation's respect, and may boldly demand the nation's generosity for their widows and daughters, without the insulting excuse of 'straitened circumstances,' or 'destitute condition.'

IX

WHAT IS HAPPINESS ?

IN an eloquent speech delivered by Mr. F. E. Smith against Women's Suffrage, a speech with whose main thesis I am in cordial agreement, and which in due time passed out of practical life into the region of *Hansard*, the orator was guilty of an *obiter dictum*, which must not go unchallenged. He declared, in fact, that 'the sum total of human happiness, knowledge, and achievement would have been almost unaffected if Sappho had never sung, if Joan of Arc had never fought, if Siddons had never played.'

Why he enveloped these great names in the musty atmosphere of women's rights or wrongs I do not know. They who bore them engaged in far worthier fights than the paltry battle of sex. They won their

triumphs in the open field of human endeavour. It is not as women that we applaud them, but as the fearless champions of life and art, who lived and worked superbly indifferent to foolish rivalries, and took their place in the starry heaven of immortality by virtue of the genius, which sustained them on this earth.

Joan of Arc needs no defence. Even if her acts had not changed the fate of Europe, her splendid courage and noble mysticism would have been an inspiration to thousands of men and women. Not merely is she secure of fame: the vision of her sacrifice will show others the path of loyalty and devotion unto the end of time. Sappho and Mrs. Siddons need a sturdier defence in these days of unenlightened commonplace, and yet it should be easy to prove the profound debt of happiness, which the world owes to these supreme artists.

If happiness be anything better than the certainty of to-morrow's dinner, then are poets and players the real makers of joy.

To the poets, above all, mankind owes the purest delight that God has given it. There is an intense pleasure breathed into the mind and spirit by beautiful words, which, if it be not comparable with, still transcends the ephemeral triumphs of politicians. What Sappho meant for her own countrymen, who might read her as they list, we can surmise only by their generous praise. For Plato she was the tenth Muse. The ancient critics did not hesitate to place her in the same rank with Homer ; she was the poetess, as he was the poet of Greece. One critic marvels at the euphony and grace of her language. Another discovers in her works his best example of sublimity. And we of to-day, who have but fragments to guide our judgment, find no dark mystery in the enthusiasm of the ancients. She writes no line that does not burn with life and movement. Her words, as the Halicarnassian said, ‘ nestle close to one another and are woven together.’ Is it wonderful, then, that she should be a poet of poets, that Catullus himself delighted to turn her

masterpiece into Latin, that our own Ben Jonson, who took his jewels of speech where he found them, borrowed from her verse one beautiful line : ‘ The dear good angel of the spring, the nightingale ’ ?

Thus it is that for more than two thousand years Sappho has increased the sum of human happiness. The happiness that came to the world when the noble, austere Siddons played was perhaps more intense at the moment of applause, and without doubt more quickly transient. The voice of the poet echoes down the corridors of time. The voice of the actor is stilled for ever in death. The poet’s is the greater, the better part, though he is not witness of the rapture which his works inspire. The actor, of course, finds some compensation in the thunder of applause which greets his well-graced entrance on the stage. What matters it, he may say to himself, if my name be writ in water, so long as in my life the incense of flattery burns upon a thousand altars ? And even dead actors may live again in the eloquent

applause of their critics. The glory of Mrs. Siddons, for instance, is for ever enshrined in Hazlitt's rhapsody, which none can read and doubt that the incomparable Sarah made a generous addition to the sum of human happiness.

Hazlitt is discoursing, it will be recalled, of the three great tragic actors of his time—Mrs. Siddons, Mr. Kean, and Madame Pasta; and it is in these terms that he describes the great artist whom Mr. F. E. Smith summarily dismisses: ‘Mrs. Siddons seemed to command every source of terror and pity, and to rule over their wildest elements with inborn ease and dignity. Her person was made to contain her spirit; her soul to fill and animate her person; her eye answered to her voice. She wore a crown. She looked as if descended from a higher sphere, and walked the earth in majesty and pride. She sounded the full diapason, touched all chords of passion; they thrilled through her, and yet she preserved an elevation of thought and character above them, like the tall cliff

round which the tempest roars, but its head reposes in the blue serene !' With such words as these in our ear, how can we assert that Sarah Siddons did not enhance our mortal happiness ?

The danger of such a hasty generalisation as Mr. F. E. Smith's is that it goes beyond the intention of its author. It travels further than the boundaries of sex. If Sappho and Mrs. Siddons are condemned, Shakespeare and Kean legitimately share the condemnation. All those, in fact, must be pronounced guilty at the bar of opinion, who have not actively striven to 'do good.' For, as I have said, this is no contest of man and woman. If it be true that the greatest poet, the greatest actor, among women failed to increase the sum of human happiness, then poetry and the drama have failed throughout the ages. But they have not failed. It is for the proper enjoyment of the arts that all human efforts are made ; it is by the solace of the arts that we are fitted to make those efforts.

There is no Government so debased that

has not recognised the paramount duty of patronage. The glory of Athens resides rather in the noble monuments wrought by Phidias, in the marmoreal tragedies of Sophocles, than in the eloquence and statesmanship of Pericles. The history of the Italian States is but the history of painting, poetry, and philosophy. If we are not ignorant of Florentine politics, it is because Machiavelli's 'Prince' introduced general ideas into the arid region of statecraft. And, as we descend through the years, it is the same tale that is told. The age of Elizabeth is less the age of Burleigh than of Shakespeare. The author of *Hamlet* created out of the dry bones of reality an imperishable kingdom of happiness and romance. Fielding was at once the maker and historian of a later age. Who shall say that Gibbon, in comparing the fortunes of the English and German branches of the Habsburgs, was guilty of exaggeration ? 'The successors of Charles v.,' wrote the author of the *Decline and Fall*, in a magniloquent passage, 'may

disdain their brethren of England, but the romance of Tom Jones, that exquisite picture of human manners, will outlive the palace of the Escorial and the imperial eagle of the House of Austria.'

In brief, all passes save the imaginings of Art. The politics, which to-day seem the last thought of wisdom and beneficence, go out forgotten into the night. The Constitutions, designed to bring perpetual prosperity upon suffering States, survive only as curiosities in a text-book. The eloquence, which hushed the Senate, is lost like the rustling of leaves in the tree-top. A word, a colour, a melody, as they bring a purer delight, so they live longer than the tangled policies of tyranny or revolution. And I verily believe that the discovery of Sappho's nine books of poems would more surely increase the sum of human happiness than the wisest Act of Parliament, which ever could be added to the Statute-book.

X

GENIUS AND WEALTH

LORD ROSEBERY, in speaking one day of Robert Burns, touched with less than his usual happiness on the vexed question of genius and wealth. 'Poverty produces masterpieces,' said he, 'and wealth smothers.' He is sure that the genius of Burns could not have survived a comfortable balance at his bank. He goes yet further, and boldly declares that, had Wordsworth been as rich as Rogers, he would have written no better than Rogers. I wonder if he would admit the converse that Rogers, in a cottage, might have composed *The Excursion*?

Superstitions die hard, and this particular superstition has survived the hostile test of reason and experience. It was not poverty, which spurred Burns to the sublime

composition of *The Jolly Beggars*. It was genius. No thought of economy quenched the divine fire. He wrote it in the prodigality of his mind, and did not trouble to give it to the world. Had poverty produced the masterpiece, poverty would have made the best bargain it could, and found solace in the barley-bree. No, Burns knew many foes within and without. In life he was, as he said himself, ‘the sport, the miserable victim of pride, hypochondriac imaginations, agonising sensibility, and bedlam passions.’ After death, he became something far worse—a national bard, the pack horse of a national sentiment. But poverty was neither his friend nor his foe. He sang the songs not of an empty pocket, but of a full heart and an eager brain.

The argument from Wordsworth is still more unsound. All the wealth of Golconda could not have affected the supreme gift of that devout man—devout in subjection to his own genius and in the worship of the Muse. Had he been thrice a banker,

he would still have been Wordsworth. He knew nothing, he cared for nothing, save the practice of his art. To the outside world he was an old gentleman who talked only of his own poetry. As Hazlitt said with truth as well as with malice: 'He tolerates nothing but what he himself creates; he sympathises with what can enter into no competition with him, with the bare earth and mountains bare, and grass in the green field. He sees nothing but himself and the universe.' What influence could the accident of gold have exerted upon an egoism such as this, cold, deep, sheltered, and immovable like a Highland tarn?

It is little indeed that we know of genius. When we see it, we do not always recognise it. It needs the sifting hand of time for its full discovery. It comes and goes, where and as it chooses. It transcends the laws of life and fate. It is a very Proteus in shape and mien. 'Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck.' One thing only we know: genius cannot be 'smothered.'

If there be an encounter, it is wealth that will be 'smothered' by genius. But the encounter seldom comes, for it is only chance which confronts two unrelated accidents.

The other qualities change as they will. Genius is invariable. It may coexist with poverty or wealth, with meanness or generosity. A thing apart, it is enclosed within an impregnable fortress of the mind. A man of genius may be adroit as an ambassador, or he may be a dolt in the conduct of human affairs. He may 'write like an angel, and speak like poor Poll.' If without the impregnable fortress he be acquisitive, he will grow rich. If he be a miser, he will collect halfpence, and blow out his candle when he sits alone. Inspired by the habits of business, he will follow the laudable ambition of a decent life; he will satisfy the longing which may be his for dignity and splendour, and he will be none the less therefore a man of genius.

Shakespeare did not return to Stratford with an empty pocket. 'Sir Simon Two-and-a-Half-Shares,' as the highwayman

called the actor, found the reward which he asked for a life of labour in the comfort and solace of New Place. And he was no less a man of genius than was Marlowe, who died at Deptford in a drunken brawl. The grandiose ambition of Sir Walter Scott was satisfied with nothing but the Gothic magnificence of Abbotsford, and if he turned his genius to what in the city is called the best account that he might obtain his ambition, who shall find a word of reproof for his thrift? And did he not presently, in his heroic struggle with the ruin caused by another, prove the courage and sacrifice of which the sanity of genius is capable?

In our own generation there was none so surely marked by the hand of genius as Alfred Tennyson. Truly it might be said of him that, like Horace, he belonged to the Muses, and if he found their wings feathered with gold, he made the best of his good fortune: he purchased estates, founded a family, and upheld the dignity of his life and of his

craft, while he surrendered not a jot of their freedom and independence. The wealth which he acquired was an economic accident, which neither 'smothered' nor enhanced its native genius. And even when wealth exists not, genius may be happy in hope and credit. Thus Goldsmith was rich, without a shilling in his pocket. He died, owing £2000, and well might Johnson exclaim, 'was ever poet so trusted before?'

If men of genius be sometimes poorer than those who follow the humbler crafts, their poverty is not a cause of their genius, but its effect. The baker and candlestick-maker are concerned chiefly with the acquisition of money. They bake bread and fashion candlesticks, not that they may express their thoughts or uphold an ideal, but that they may prove worthy of their hire. The man of genius looks to another end than riches, which, when they come to him, come as a welcome accident. Concerned only with the perfection of his work, he forgets perchance the weight and value of money. But it is not in this

forgetfulness that his genius lies. That, as I have said, is a thing apart, which asks for judgment on its own merits, and does not admit the plea of extenuating circumstances.

It is the danger of such generalisations as Lord Rosebery's that they persuade us to mistake the accidents of genius for its proper expression. Riot, drunkenness, and poverty are the infrequent companions of poetry. Burns might have loved women and the bottle, even if he had not written a line of *The Jolly Beggars*. Balzac's necessity of debt was born not of his genius but of his temperament. In their daily life men of genius differ not perceptibly from their fellows, and thousands have died of poverty or excess who never tasted the waters of Helicon. Between them come those starveling souls, who, mistaking the foible of genius for its forte, believe that in mimicking the sins of poets they will catch their inspiration. To these let it be said again that genius lies in nothing else than in its own expression.

And if now and again we base our delight upon the misery of others, if there was nothing the world could do for Burns, which should compensate for a sublime inheritance of verse, let us accept the gift in thankful humility. Above all, genius should suffer no reproach. If it have vices, let us forget and forgive them. Let us show a still greater magnanimity, and condone even its homelier virtues.

XI

THE DECAY OF COMEDY

THE one benefit which the short-lived Repertory Theatre conferred upon the world was the production of a little masterpiece, called *The Sentimentalists*, and written by George Meredith. The critics reproved it for its lack of action. It threw its audiences into a bored slumber. And had it not been for the happy wisdom of a magazine, which presently printed it, its fate might have been swift as a butterfly's—to sparkle an hour, and then perish in oblivion.

Captured in print, it lost perforce something of its charm. The artist, who composed it, made his appeal to the ear, not to the eye. His magic words were designed to be spoken. There is not a line in the fragment—for a fragment it is—either of prose or verse, whose mere falling upon the sense is not a delight. When we hold

the text in our hand, we must use an effort to recall the charm. So nicely is the drama suited to its purpose, that it seems but a half of itself without the voices of the actors, without the delicate decoration of the stage. But the half that remains is still a treasure. Even the eye that reads can see in a moment that it is pervaded by the true spirit of comedy.

For once style and purpose are intimately united. George Meredith's purpose was to shoot folly, as it flies; but if his aim is unerring, his archer's hand is light upon the string. While he corrects, he amuses and enchants. His Professor Spiral, whose 'oratory is a whole orchestral symphony,' who launches forth, 'like an eagle from a cliff,' is a sketch of an English Tartuffe. His Astraea, 'a dedicated widow,' is a sentimentalist, whose heart is destined to revolt. About her circle the other persons of the drama, in pious worship or kindly ridicule. And from beginning to end the dialogue glints and flashes, always brilliant, always humorous.

Yet the public would have none of *The Sentimentalists*. Its ear does not thrill to the music of beautiful words. It knows nothing of George Meredith, who did not take the precaution, seldom neglected by other dramatists, of 'writing to the papers.' The public, moreover, has its own views of comedy, which were not Meredith's. It goes to the theatre to laugh—to laugh idly. For those who most patiently haunt the stalls, the drama is a time-killer, a pleasant instrument for doing away with the necessity of conversation. As they will tell you, they go to the theatre to be taken out of themselves, a difficult enterprise, one would think, when there is so little to emerge from. They cannot bear to hear tragedy, because, as their stock phrase has it, 'there's too much of that in real life,' an absurd boast in the mouths of men, whose notion of tragedy is a punctured motor-tyre. Were they asked to hear comedy, which seldom happens to them, they would not understand it. Its fine point would miss their ear, the serious

delicacy, which is its essence, would evaporate in the chill atmosphere of antipathy, which lies over the footlights.

For the theatre, like the hustings, is governed by the majority. There minorities have no rights and little consideration. Pleasures taken in common must perforce be judged not by the most but by the least intelligent among those who share them. And the taste of the English public is crude in its simplicity. Sentimentality governs it, and if it is to respond with a whole heart to the appeal of the stage, it must be given farce, which is comedy run to seed, or melodrama, which is tragedy hard-riden, and pulled up short at the last ditch of disaster. The theatre-goer, in truth, must not be asked to exercise a critical judgment. He would rather guffaw than laugh. For him the symbol of comedy is a bladder on the end of a string, and he can split his sides at the foolish discomfiture of him, on whose head the bladder resounds. His melodrama must be equally primitive. Not one personage must differ

from the accepted type. His wicked baronet must be very wicked indeed. No spark of intelligence must check his bluff hero, until he is saved in the fifth act by the god or goddess descending blithely from the machine.

So it comes about that the average playgoer delights above all in a strange convention called musical comedy, which is never comedy and seldom musical. In the contemplation of this varied entertainment he never grows weary. He knows which act should be enlivened by the great duet, in which act the Muse of the twinkling feet should sing her song. He can even distinguish between one example of the kind and another. Viewed by his practised eyes, the Girl from Here bears no resemblance to the Girl from There. He delights in those merchants of the comic, whose business is to make themselves ridiculous. And it is easy to appreciate the bewilderment which he would feel if he strayed perchance upon so pure a comedy as George Meredith's *Sentimentalists*.

And should the average play-goer be persuaded to endure the performance of what is known as an 'intellectual drama,' he is satisfied only with a savage presentation of the truth. He owns that he makes a vast concession in passing an evening among persons, whom he would not know 'at home,' for he is still unable to separate life and art. But if he must suffer, let him suffer openly and crudely. If a lesson must be thrust upon him, let it be brutally expressed. The act of Mr. Galsworthy's *Justice* which most tightly 'gripped' its spectators was the act in which no word was spoken, the act which was a pantomime of suffering, a panorama of degradation, a blatant appeal to the self-pity of the mob. That the sermon of his preaching should elude nobody, Mr. Galsworthy put upon the stage a convict in the throes of solitary confinement. Not a word was said. What was seen plainly exceeded the limits of dramatic art. But the spectators went home with terror in their souls and prejudice in their

minds, as though they had heard a tub-thumper fulminate in Exeter Hall. And the dramatist's purpose no doubt was effected.

What, then, should those who take delight in the eccentricities of drama say of comedy? They understand it not; they know not whence it came. It has never been popular. To-day in England at any rate it is almost unknown. Yet, if we chose, we might understand its qualities, we might mark its character. If we leave out of our count the comedy of Aristophanes, that magic tree filled with 'singing nightingales, and climbing, chattering apes,' and the comedy of Shakespeare, which wore the robe of poetry and romance, comedy has never changed its face. It meant for Meredith what it meant for Menander. It is, and has always been, a painting of manners, an attempt to show society what it is, and what are its failings with a light hand and without censoriousness. An absence of exaggeration, a restraint in action, a propriety of style—these are essential to it. The greatest

comedy in the strict sense of the word that we have in English, Congreve's *Way of the World*, has the mere semblance of a plot. For Congreve comedy resided strictly in phrase and portraiture. And this very limitation renders pure comedy distasteful to the general. It demands a power of comparing life with art, a power unexercised by the popular drama. Dryden has made this distinction clear in a few lines. 'Comedy,' he says, 'presents us with the imperfections of human nature ; farce entertains us with what is monstrous and chimerical ; the one causes laughter in those who can judge of men and manners, by the lively representation of their folly and corruption ; the other produces the same effect in those who can judge of neither, and that only by its extravagance.' To-day the monstrous and chimerical win all the suffrages ; and if it be true that 'there will never be civilisation where comedy is not possible,' the frigid reception of Meredith's enchanting fragment places us sadly, if not irrevocably, without the pale.

XII

OLD AND NEW TRAVELLERS

AT the fall of the year all those who have a shilling in their pocket, and some who have not, pack up their bags and hie them away across the Channel. If they cannot change their minds, they are determined at least to change their sky, an enterprise of itself worth many a sacrifice. The mere breath of a fresh breeze, the mere sound of an unwonted speech are sufficient to remove from our backs the burden of daily grinding care. And this truth the ideal traveller recognises. He travels for travel's sake. His ambition is not to 'improve his mind,' but to recapture the holiday spirit of his youth, to silence once more the insistent voice of responsibility. So, with as light a wallet as possible, he sets forth, caring not whither he goes, and cherishing in his

mind the pleasures of uncertainty. Happiest is he, if in the morning he know not what roof will shelter him at night, if throughout the day he chooses for the companions of his voyage contentment and hope. 'They run not,' said Montaigne, 'that run after a benefice or after a hare, but they run that run at barriers and to exercise their running.'

So they travel not who travel for some definite profit or advantage. Yet how much may the intelligent traveller learn, if he keep his mind free from pedantry! After the delight of the road, to enjoy which is the chief purpose of those, who leave their homes, there is the diversity of other men's 'lives, customs, humours, and phantasies.' To drink new wines, to eat unaccustomed food—these are the legitimate joys of the traveller, who, while he marks all that differs from his own experience, must harden his heart against the sin of hasty generalisation. He who would condemn a whole nation because he encounters an extortionate innkeeper should be forbidden

by law ever to leave his native country again.

The journeys of to-day differ in purpose and design from the journeys of yesterday. If we would find an unknown land we must go further afield. Time was when Russia seemed undiscoverable, like the North Pole. And railways, as they have annihilated distance, are fast annihilating curiosity. The truth is that what all men may enjoy loses something of its freshness, and it was this reflection that persuaded the French philosopher to discern in travelling 'something democratic, a secret love of majorities,' which should be avoided. Fortunately, the majorities may be avoided. There are still some corners of the world in which the tourist is unknown, and which are not yet defaced by the paper bag and ginger-beer bottle of advanced civilisation.

A worse defect in modern travel is its absence of adventure. It is no longer the unexpected that happens. Ease and Mr. Bradshaw have proved themselves the determined and triumphant enemies of

uncertainty. And yet, as we look back upon the past, we may discover one source of satisfaction—we are no longer condemned, not even the most prosperous of us, to the tyranny of the Grand Tour. In the seventeenth century the Grand Tour was as stern and arduous as a university course. James Howell, in his *Instructions for Forreine Travell*, has set out the aims and duties of a young Englishman, who went forth to see the world. The book, published in 1642, was written, by a strange irony of fate, in the Fleet Prison, where the author might survey the countries of Europe only with his mind's eye. It is none the less vivid for that, nor has time robbed it of its value. Though no traveller will ever again put it in his pocket as a present guide, it preserves for us a picture or 'character' of Europe, which is a clear proof that mind and temper outlast the most rigid of political systems.

Most liberally did James Howell treat the youth of England both in time and money. He sent them touring for three

years and four months, and he allowed them £300 a year each, and £50 apiece for their servants. Nor was it in any spirit of idleness that James Howell bade them go forth. The Grand Tour in his eyes was a moving academy, or the true Peripatetic School. It was not for pleasure nor at hazard that the young zealots of the seventeenth century crossed the Channel. They sat in their carriages, which rumbled heavily across France, they sojourned in the vast and comfortable inns, which have survived to welcome the motor-car, intent upon self-improvement. They devoted themselves gravely to acquire the languages, to understand the customs, to master the politics and literature of the lands through which they passed. Books, says Howell, must be the traveller's constant companions, and 'he must choose them, as he should do his friends, few, but choice ones, yet he may have many acquaintances.' But, lest he grow too bookish, he must apply himself also 'to know the fashion and garb of the Court,

observe the person and genius of the Prince, and inquire of the greatest noblemen and their pedigree (which I recommend to his special consideration).’ Above all, he was to seek conversation with any famous men there might be, a habit, which was continued far into the eighteenth century, when no Englishman ever thought of traversing the Channel without paying his respects to Voltaire at Ferney, and which Howell easily justifies by the saying of a great emperor that he had rather go fifty miles to hear a wise man than five to see a fair city.

Thus the young Englishman was bidden to read foreign countries like a book, and to neglect the foolish toys which engross his descendants. It was his to spend the hours in reading, in meditation, or in discourse. ‘By the first,’ says Howell, ‘he converseth with the dead, by the second with himself, by the last with the living.’ And, if he returned to his island home in any other guise than that of the prig, it was not the fault of his wise and

excellent mentor. Moreover, he is reminded, and justly too, that the best means of understanding foreign lands is to understand his own. He must not be an eagle abroad, and a stark buzzard at home. A knowledge of England, in brief, must teach him the true modesty.

In the seventeenth century, then, travelling was an affair of scholarship and discernment. It was not enough to run through France and Spain. The young voyager was instructed by Howell in words, which have not lost one jot of their truth, to compare the characters of the nations which he visited. He was asked to observe, with an amazing sense of prophecy, how it was that Germany, 'its power being divided 'twixt so many, serves only to balance itself, who if it had one absolute monarch would prove terrible to all the rest.' Thus the golden youth of three centuries since went abroad but once in his life. He undertook the duty in no light spirit. He learned such lessons as should last him through many years of

home-keeping. The golden youth of to-day spends his week-ends in Paris, and never goes beyond the dominion of our English tongue. Neither Howell's contemporary nor our own is the ideal traveller. Perhaps neither of them is a traveller at all. The one strove to learn too much ; the other is content to learn nothing. But the true traveller, as I have said, journeys for pleasure, and never in haste. Nothing irks him, nothing disconcerts him, and if night surprise him far from the shelter of an inn, shall he not lie happily at the Sign of the Great Bear ?

XIII

JOHN BULL AND HIS RIVALS

THE publication of Mr. Meredith's *Celt and Saxon*, with its extravagant tirade concerning 'Bull,' recalls the almost universal practice of inventing some gross personage to represent the character and temperament of this nation or that. The practice is natural enough. Images appeal more vividly than ideas to the mind of man. To see is always easier than to argue, and a plain, simple vision has more power to convince than many volumes of theory. Anthropomorphism—the faculty of enduing abstractions with mortal shape—is the common tendency of primitive man and the germ of the poet's symbolism. Savages carve their gods into the rude semblance of themselves. They bow down to idols, which if their skill had been greater would

have been nothing else than portraits. Nor is there in this ingenious method of worship any impiety. The savage cannot but interpret the unseen in terms of the seen, and he approaches as nearly to realism as his ignorance will permit him.

The personification of nationality, on the other hand, is made always without piety, and generally in scorn. The nations set up idols of themselves not to worship, but to kick and insult. Jacques Bonhomme and John Bull, France and England anthropomorphised, are figures of fun. They are, so to say, Aunt Sallies, at which their enemies, foreign and home-bred, may have as many shies as they like for nothing.

Devised in contempt, these personifications are composed chiefly of vices. Each one bears the burden of all the sins of his fellows. The virtue, which everywhere flourishes by the side of vice, is purposely suppressed, while the vice is transformed by that touch of exaggeration, which is the essence of caricature. John Bull, Jacques Bonhomme, Fritz the Ger-

man, Sandy the Scot, Paddy the Irishman, exist in comic papers and in the popular imagination. The world of reality knows them not, and their invention, trivial as it might appear, has led before now to political crises and even to international complication.

This habit of caricature, in truth, is the more foolish because there is no such thing as a national character. It is impossible to express England or France by a pictorial formula. Nations are not merely multiplex; they are ever changing. The Germany of to-day is not the Germany of yesterday. Even if we attempt to strike an average, the attempt can be made only for a single generation. And what is most strangely baffling in the persistent attempt to fit the countries of Europe with their symbols is that the symbols, for the most part, have no point of contact with their countries. That France, the home of the arts, the cradle of heroes, should have found so obscure a representative as Jacques Bonhomme is one of the puzzles of history.

That there are Jacques Bonhommes in France none would deny. He is a type that may be found under any sky. But he is in no sense characteristic, and a more absurd representative could not be found for the France of Rabelais and Molière, of Descartes and Pascal, of Louis XIV. and Napoleon. Genius, courage, and splendour are the inheritance of the French. Shall they be personified in a foolish man clad in a blouse, or in the pompous citizen who speaks in the well-worn phrases of Monsieur Prudhomme ?

But the most monstrous perversion of all is John Bull. You cannot arrive at him by counting heads. He will elude the most diligent study of the past. We have many worse in our midst. Him we know not, and it will defy the efforts of the fiercest Anglophobe to discover his lair. We are all familiar with his image, as presented in the comic papers. I wonder if he has ever been revealed even to England's bitterest enemy ? What is he, then ? What are his qualities and

pretensions ? He is obese, above all. A Falstaffian paunch suggests an inability to move or think, though it does not suggest for a moment the immortal humour of Shakespeare's fat knight. His obesity binds him to the earth, and invests with a kind of earthiness his hopes, his purposes, and his ambitions. He never lifts his eyes to heaven, save in greedy anxiety for his crops. He cares not for poetry or philosophy ; he despises the decorative side of life. The one god of his whole-hearted idolatry is the bundle of bank-notes strapped up in his breeches pocket. This he adores with a constant devotion, and a sincere prayer that it may never prove less. To it he is ready to sacrifice his rest, his leisure, and his honour. To increase it, he will live laborious days, and sleep through the long nights with half-opened eyes. He goes through the world, selfish, useless, and esurient.

Thus it follows that he cares neither for his country nor his country's fame. So long as he is permitted to add another roll

to his stock of bank-notes he is content. As for the defence of hearth and home, he is sure that the Channel will be all-sufficient for them, and he cares not how many enemies clamour at his door. England is an island, and his pocket is full, and overhead the sun is still shining. The single virtue which he boasts is a sort of obstinacy, which forbids him to change his view and to take on a new habit, or to acknowledge himself in the wrong. But this virtue is not enough to redeem his many vices, and he remains stolid and clumsy, the least amiable portrait in the gallery of nations.

And as we contemplate his placid protuberance we wonder whence in the world he came. He corresponds to nothing in fact. He represents exclusively the agricultural interest, which died an unnatural death many years ago. He is too heavy to ride to hounds, the one sport which is religiously English. Nor are his terrene qualities in any sense characteristic of his country. I would not dogmatise concern-

ing England, in which good and bad are mixed as elsewhere. I would not substitute for John Bull another formula, equally irrelevant. But if we may judge of a nation by its policy, we cannot but admit that Great Britain has bred men of constructive imagination, men who have gazed across the wide horizons of the sea, and pictured to themselves the new lands that lay beyond. Before all things, the policy of England has been a policy of ideals. In that which she has achieved she has sought profit less eagerly than the solution of a problem. Her dominions oversea have never been a field of extortion. She has watched their growth with the proud eye of sympathy, an eye which looks not out from the fat face of our friend John Bull. You cannot imagine that old gentleman, clad in breeches three sizes too small for him, holding the gorgeous East in fee, and then, as if that were not enough, founding a new empire in the Pacific Ocean.

However, the image has been set up, and

we must still bear with our changeling. For a changeling John Bull is, and none of our breed. Drake and Nelson were not his kinsmen. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Tennyson knew him not. He is not sib to Chatham and Pitt. Even the voter, foolish as he is, resembles him neither for good nor evil. In brief, he has no more of truth in him than Paddy the Irishman, that imagined victim of Saxon asperity and insensitiveness, or Sandy the Scot, who is said to 'jock wi' deeficulty,' and to deplore perpetually 'the saxpence that went bang.' But there he stands in all his obstinate rotundity, and there he will stand to give a false impression unto the end of time.

XIV

THE NATION'S TREASURES

A SUDDEN fire at Brussels, which proved the risks incidental to all exhibitions, and the losses sustained by the museum at South Kensington would not have been wholly in vain if they had dissuaded governments and private collectors from too generously sending their treasures across the sea. Those who are privileged to possess works of art have no right to endanger their existence. Whether their motive be benevolence or pride, it is in either case insufficient. There is no excuse for dragging precious pictures or rare furniture up and down Europe, like travellers' samples. Even if they escape destruction by fire or flood, they are battered by the way; and there is only one place in which to see the masterpieces

of art and handicraft, and that is the treasure-house to which they properly belong.

The nations hold their treasures in trust. As they received them from their forefathers, a noble inheritance, so it is their duty to transmit them untarnished to posterity. They must give an honest and honourable account of their stewardship. Those who are responsible for an irreparable loss must answer for their carelessness at the bar of history. It is no matter for monetary compensation. Works of art must be measured not by the cipher of an auction-room, but by the pleasure which their contemplation may afford. A picture by Rembrandt may exchange hands for the sum of £100,000. If it be destroyed, all the hoards of all the millionaires cannot bring it back into the world of vision.

It is clear, then, that no mistaken amiability should persuade our museums to relinquish even for a month the charge, that is laid upon them, to guard their treasures with jealous eye and anxious

hand. The splendour of a nation's collections, the care and taste wherewith they are preserved are some measures of a nation's grandeur. We express our magnificence, whether we be English, or French, or German, by our eagerness to possess the best that the world of art can give us. In days of old art followed the flag. A successful war justified itself partly by the great libraries and fine pictures, which the victorious generals carried to their homes as a symbol of conquest. What had been won by the sword served for the contemplation of peaceful citizens. And though the ancient motto, 'Spoils to the victor,' is no longer written upon our banners, there is many a capital which still takes a legitimate pride in the priceless gems of painting and typography, which rewarded the conduct of a successful campaign.

So when we visit picture galleries and museums we may read upon their walls the history of the past. London and Windsor are eloquent of the debt we owe

to monarchs, who were patrons of art as well as upholders of their country's honour and their country's faith. It is to the generosity of Henry VIII. that is due the proud possession of Holbein's masterpieces. The king, who by his munificence brought the great painter to the English Court, should still attach to his memory the gratitude of England. And in the taste of Charles I., who bade Vandyke commemorate a great age, that sad monarch's unhappy fate is for the moment happily forgotten.

The Socialists, no doubt, would tell us that picture galleries and libraries are purchased with ill-spent money. They are not contrived for the immediate profit of the proletariat. The capitalist, also, may if he will take pleasure in them. In the thrice-fortunate days when the hope of the Socialist is realised, when we all live in hygienic prisons, fed, clothed, taught, and doctored at the public expense, there shall be no need of those things which embellish life. The Government, intent

upon the feeding and educating of its victims, will not be permitted to waste its money upon the purchase of paintings and sculptures. It will have done its duty, if it distribute with impartial hand an equal dose of comfortable misery to each of its dependants. But even from the Socialist's point of view the Government will be wrong. The possession of works of art is not merely honourable, it is also profitable to a nation.

For picture galleries are like the shrines of the ancient world. Pilgrims take long journeys to gaze upon their treasures. And, where there are pilgrims, there comes profit in their train. The railways along which the pilgrims travel, the taverns where they are fed and sheltered, all the complex energies of life feel the quickening effect. Not that I would lay stress upon this accident of the arts. But its advantage as an argument is evident even to the most rigid utilitarian. That which helps to fill the pocket of the cabdriver and hotel proprietor may not seem wholly despicable

even to those, who on every other ground would condemn as pernicious folly the purchase of a painted canvas or piece of sculptured marble.

Far greater than the profit is the honour. The Spain of to-day no longer plays a foremost part in the policies of Europe. The conquests of Charles v. are but as a tale that is told. The glory of the Museum of the Prado has outlived all the victories of war, all the triumphs of diplomacy. If, under the auspices of Philip iv., Spain lost her universal power, she gained in the cherished genius of Velazquez something which invincible armies could not give her. So, forgetful of a long line of kings, unmindful of a shattered Empire, we visit Madrid, conscious that there we may see a vision of beauty and splendour which no other capital can afford.

Thus it comes about that many a city is associated indissolubly in our minds with this or that miracle of art. Lille is the seat of a distinguished university. It is the centre of ever-increasing activity.

Its busy streets are packed with prosperous citizens. Yet many travellers pause at Lille neither to hear its professors nor to engage in its commerce. For there in the museum is kept, as in a temple, the famous bust of wax which has baffled spectators and connoisseurs alike. Who modelled the strange and wistful head none knows. Who shall say what is the meaning of its solemn and elusive smile? Its sightless eyes still look out upon us, wondering and mysterious. Within the waxen brow is imprisoned something of palpitating life. And many a pilgrim who cares little for learning or profit will still visit Lille, knowing that on the lips of the waxen bust there still lurks for him the smile of an unrevealed secret.

And as a sacred charge is laid upon museums, so also those who are privileged to guard in their houses the masterpieces of art may not lightly endanger them. The hands, which fashioned them, fashioned them for all time, and purchase does not confer upon the purchaser the right over them

of life and death. He who owns them enjoys them for his lifetime alone. He is faithless to his trust, if he bequeaths them in worse shape than that in which they came to his hands. Truly he shall not be held guiltless, if he expose them to the risk of fire and water. Let him allow those to see them, who are willing to undertake the proper pilgrimage. Above all, let him remember that steamboats and railway trucks are not the proper homes of works of art, and that he who risks the existence of books or pictures, even though his own money has bought them, is an accomplice in destruction.

XV

THE LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE

THE meetings of the British Association, once notorious, have ceased to be fruitful of surprise or sensation. Its speakers are no longer facetious, as in days of old. They make no attempt to lighten the gravity of their speech with quips and jests. They do not improve the occasion with moral discourses. Accordingly they have been condemned as dull by the critics, and, if they deserve all that is said in their dispraise, they may easily retort that it is not their business to amuse or to improve, that science is not even distantly related either to the pulpit or the music hall.

Indeed, the failure of the learned to excite the interest of the people is in a sense the best proof of their competence. Science has suffered not a little, especially

in England, from an unmerited popularity. In the dim eighties of the last century the natural sciences became so many branches of rhetoric. The vague quality, called eloquence, was more highly esteemed than the true spirit of scientific inquiry. Chemists and geologists, who should have known better, thumped their tubs with an unrestrained energy. The pupils of Darwin, who still wears with Newton the wreath of scientific supremacy, discovered in *The Origin of Species* a new method of theology, and thus ignored the teaching of their master. A general superstition grew up that there was nothing which science could not achieve. Not only was it ready to save our bodies in this world ; it was ready also to save our souls in the next. Briefly, it seemed to a thousand ardent proselytes most necessary for salvation, and straightway its popularity was assured. The intellectually restless took refuge from a ' creed outworn ' in a scientific dogma, rhetorically expressed, which they were wholly incapable of under-

standing. With the hopefulness bred of novelty, they were sure that all would be well, here and hereafter, if only they listened to the rotund utterances of chemical evangelists. And they met together thirty years ago in a very different spirit from that which animates them to-day.

With a light heart they surrendered their old beliefs, and were sure that they proved an intellectual superiority in accepting the freshest doctrine contrived by the biologist. When Professor Tyndall stood up and quoted Lucretius in a famous address all seemed well with both worlds. Science was not only triumphant; it was fashionable. Art and literature bowed humbly before it. The mere discussion of such vague problems as spontaneous generation gave it an impetus far greater than any imparted thereto by Newton or Darwin, and to the populace at any rate it appeared the golden age of science, when science had travelled furthest from its proper province.

And thus it came about that the im-

portance of science and its mission was vastly exaggerated. Reaction followed inevitably. Much was heard in France and in England concerning the bankruptcy of science. The phrase, invented by M. Brunetière, had far more meaning than such phrases are wont to carry with them. In the sense that science had not fulfilled its obligations, it was indeed bankrupt. It had promised to invent a new world, to correct the old theology, to bring the solace of assurance to wavering minds, and it had done none of these things. The rhetoric of its professors had found no other echo than disappointment. The philosophic doubt, which once had seemed a necessity, no longer fulfilled the aspirations of inquiring spirits. The foundations of belief seemed more firmly established than ever. And the victims, whose peace of mind had been wantonly disturbed, turned upon the new dogma and rent it. In tyranny it was fiercer than the old ; in authority and tradition it was the upstart of yesterday.

To-day a better feeling prevails. It is recognised that science, like literature, is concerned with itself alone. It cannot, and should not be asked to save the souls of men, or to 'render their lives happier,' as the common phrase has it. To uncover the secrets of nature; to decipher the history which is written in mountain, valley, and stream; to wrest from the past the reason of custom and tradition; to isolate substances, hitherto vaguely surmised; to find fresh elements—these are a few of the legitimate tasks of science. Sometimes the performance of these tasks is met with a legitimate reward. If it be, the true man of science cares not. His hope begins and ends with research. The fortune which Lord Kelvin amassed was a comfortable accident. It was an accident only in the career of a great man of science, and should not affect the estimate which is made of his splendid discoveries. In truth, the science that is worthiest of respect is pursued with no desire of gain, and to reproach it with having no bearing

upon the pains and pleasures of life is to confuse its scope and to misunderstand its purpose.

So, when we hear that the British Association is losing touch with the people, we need think none the worse of it for that. Rather let us wonder that it ever stooped to make a popular appeal. Neither science nor the people would lose much, if no attempt ever was made to bring them together. In the many congresses, which disturb the autumn of the year, there is a kind of vulgarity which we cannot too bitterly deplore. They are but so many attempts to democratise learning, to turn what should be a serious pursuit into a picnic. If men of science, bound together by the ties of a common interest, choose to meet together for the discussion of their researches, there is no reason why they should not. But why should they take the unknowing public into their confidence? Why should they descend from the serene height of investigation to attempt the impossible task of amusing or instructing

the crowd ? And what has science, which should be a jealous mistress, to do with cheap trips and noisy excursions ? No man can serve God and Mammon, and it is a wholesome sign that after thirty years of rhetoric the world of science is beginning to find it out.

The truth is that there is a kind of stuffiness in congresses of all kinds. It matters not a jot for what purpose they are met together. Books, science, and politics are one and all an insufficient excuse. And the enterprise is all the worse when it is publicly undertaken. The lion is a noble animal. He loses his nobility when he is asked to dance to the popular tune. Nor is it by mobs that good work is ever achieved. The workshop, not the platform, is the proper arena of research. Nothing has ever added to our knowledge, which has not been done in secrecy and solitude. It was not at a congress that Newton discovered the force of gravitation. It was not by haunting assemblies that Darwin arrived at his

theory of the origin of species. And the worst of it is that evil communications corrupt good manners. Science, with the limelight turned upon her brow, is apt to forget her limitations, to pretend that she can solve the insoluble, and can bring solace by her mere presence into many a stricken home. So it is that many, hearing with satisfaction of the loosened hold, which the British Association is said to have upon the general curiosity, will reflect that the unpopularity of science is the most hopeful sign of its usefulness, and that one hour of quiet research spent in the study is better worth than many a weary week of tea-meetings.

XVI

THE TYRANNY OF GOLF

To the returning traveller, who has spent some weeks under foreign skies, England appears at the first sight as the country where they play golf. Everywhere the tyranny of the game is visible. The railway stations are packed with golfers—men who would not journey ten miles from their homes, unencumbered with the necessary clubs. As you look out from the window of the train, which carries you to London, you see without pause or intermission the same sight. The pursuit of the white ball is universal. It is undertaken in a spirit of solemn sacrifice. The laughter of gaiety must not approach the green. There is no sign of light-hearted joy in this serious profession. The first rule of golf etiquette is that ‘no player, caddie, or onlooker should move or talk during a stroke.’ And,

though I believe that after the stroke the worst blasphemies are excused, a studied alternation of silence and self-reproach is not the best encouragement of hilarity.

However, it is not the grimness of golf that I would condemn, but its tyranny. None can escape it. It leaves no corner of the land inviolate. The whole of Great Britain is now mapped out into golf links, from north to south, from east to west. If time-honoured rifle-ranges injure the nerves of the sacred player, they must be (and have been) suppressed. I can well believe that a man might play from the tee at Land's End and hole his ball in the top-most promontory of Caithness, without ever stirring a yard from an eighteen-hole course. That the homely crafts of husbandry are still permitted to flourish here and there is the one concession which golf makes to our daily life. In all else she is a jealous sovereign, demanding and obtaining the wholehearted devotion of her patient lieges.

The benefits, which Englishmen have

obtained from their games and manly sports, are a commonplace. Priceless lessons of good temper and self-reliance have been learned at cricket and football. The skill of hand and eye necessary to the gentler game are no less admirable than the spirit and courage enforced by the other. If, as is easily credible, the well-educated Englishman is of a better temper and of a higher resolution than men of his own age and class abroad, it is no doubt to games that he owes his superiority. But it should be remembered that cricket and football are but the means to this desirable end, and that they are not carried into middle life, with any better reason than the Latin grammar, which once taught the unwilling boy the art of prose.

To all field sports, to all other games than golf, there are appointed times and seasons. A man may not hunt at midsummer. He cannot play cricket on Christmas Day. However violent his passion for this pastime or that, there are many months, in which perforce he must curb that passion, in

which, to be sure, the pastime itself is nothing more than a pleasant memory. Cricket and football, again, demand for their proper exercise the suppleness of youth. When once the muscles harden into their places, the hero of a thousand games must himself become a spectator, or discover at the last that life holds something else fit for accomplishment than sport.

The tyranny of golf, on the other hand, ceases only with life. It knows not the restrictions of time and season. It may be played in July and December with equal comfort and facility. Not a single day is unsuitable for the pursuit of the white ball. Nor need any age be inefficient. As a child of nine is not too young, so a veteran of ninety is not too old. Not for nothing has it been called the old man's game. And thus it is that golf absorbs the energies of the nation as no other game has ever absorbed them, until it has passed from a condition of mere boredom and has become a national danger.

Long ago it ceased to be a sport and

became a profession. The true golfer is a professional, no more and no less. The fact that he earns no money at the game does not in reality affect his state. He is a professional in the sense that he lives for golf and golf alone. It is the only career, the only ambition that he knows. Even if at the outset he has other interests and other aspirations, he speedily forgets them, and henceforth regards golf with a gravity, which he cannot bring to the discharge of any duty. Henceforth golf is for him the test and touchstone of all things. In his eyes a 'plus' player is a hero to whom the wisest statesman and the bravest general should alike bow the knee. To 'foozle a drive' he regards as an irreparable disaster. He thinks no pains lost which shall improve his game by a single stroke.

Thus there is growing up in our midst a generation, which knows nothing else than golf, which is ignorant of European history and politics, which has a vague belief that Paris is a city in the neighbourhood of Le Touquet, and that Berlin, which cannot

boast an eighteen-hole course, has not yet been called into existence. These sportsmen travel not. Travel takes them too far away from their favourite links. They think not. Thought may put them off their stroke. So they dream of 'stymies' and go early on the links. If you ask them why they play golf they will tell you it makes them 'fit.' Fit for what? For more golf.

So, in obedience to the universal domination, England is changing her manners and her customs. That as little time as possible should be withheld from the golf course the week-end encroaches on the week. Once upon a time 'Saturday to Monday' was deemed long enough for the recuperation of jaded nerves. Then a wiseacre discovered that 'Friday to Tuesday' gave the ardent golfer two other days. And, if that left only Wednesday and Thursday for the proper settlement of his own and the nation's affairs, there was no help for it. Affairs must give way to golf, and there's an end.

The result is a curious confusion in the values of things. Golf, which is a game and no more, which was played in Scotland for many years, and is still played there by some in the pure spirit of sport, has appeared to Englishmen as the whole duty of man. Here we have another proof of the danger of transferring from one soil to another games or plants or animals. The rabbit, harmless in England, has proved the ruin of Australia. Legislation alone could check the ardour of the Fijians, who, when cricket was first introduced to their enchanted island, thought that the proper limit of a match was six weeks. The English have interpreted the game of golf with a more than Fijian liberality. A game which lasts six weeks is all too brief for them. So they have appointed that golf shall be played everywhere, every day, and all the year round.

Now, even though golf be the noblest game that ever the ingenuity of man contrived, we may yet pay too high a price for it. In the international competition

of to-day we cannot afford to yield the smallest advantage. If, while we are enwrapped in the mysteries of golf, our rivals make a profound study of politics and train themselves in all the difficult arts of war, it will avail us little to possess the first links in Europe. In the temper of modern England there is nothing more gravely deplorable than the apathetic levity, with which her citizens approach serious questions of State. To arouse them to the necessity of self-defence seems an almost hopeless task. National service is shirked by one class, because it would interfere with a pleasant habit of loafing about the public-house ; it is shirked by another class, because it would interfere with the amiable contest, which it is never tired of waging against 'Colonel Bogey.' But there are worse enemies, in store for us than 'Bogey,' enemies, who cannot be defeated by cleek or niblick. And when the hour of danger strikes will it not shame us that golf has dulled the edge of patriotism, that our hands are better fitted to carry clubs than rifles ?

XVII

THE ANNIHILATION OF SPACE

WHEN, after many years of absence, Dr. Johnson visited Lichfield, still the object of pious pilgrimages, he was astonished at the modesty of his native town. The imagination of youth had magnified its houses and ennobled its streets. The experience of Dr. Johnson is familiar to us all. None of us can revisit his ancient haunts without surprise. The truth is that our own growth dwarfs the memory of past things. Our standard of grandeur changes with the passage of time. Seen through the mist of fancy, a poor hill shows like a cloud-capped mountain, a mere rivulet assumes the dignity of the silver Thames.

The familiar experience of each one of us is also the experience of mankind. The whole race looks upon size and distance

with a more lenient eye than three centuries ago. Cities which once appeared far distant one from another now rub shoulders with a kind of intimacy. Time was when London, which year by year extends its borders and may still be traversed in half an hour, was a congeries of separate, almost inaccessible towns, a sign of whose independence remains in the High Streets now tethered at either end to the main thoroughfare. In the seventeenth century, no one embarked upon a journey from Westminster to London without forethought. When Swift took refuge in Chelsea from the society of his friends, he recognised that he was dwelling in another city. In foul weather he made 'the journey,' as he called it, by stage-coach. When he returned on foot, he rejoiced that he went with an empty pocket, and so could laugh at the footpads. Even in the heyday of Holland House, Lady Holland's guests set out for Kensington as for a sojourn in the country. Yet Kensington was no further from Charing Cross

than it is to-day, and ten minutes in a taxicab will take us thither.

In fact, the annihilation of space is the great achievement, for good or evil, of the modern world. It has come upon us with a strange suddenness, and an explanation is not so simple as it might seem. Of course, the facilities of what the Americans call 'transportation' have played a large part in the change. When Queen Elizabeth came to the throne London was a grave and silent town. Its streets were emptied of all save foot passengers. Stow tells us that 'shod carts' were forbidden to enter the city except upon such reasonable cause as 'the service of the Prince.' And, if an infrequent carriage made its appearance, its fore-horse was decently led by hand. Then a hungry Dutchman brought coaches to England, but for many years none but the highest nobility presumed to ride in them. At last, when James I. sat upon the throne, the old restraint vanished. What seemed a vast number of carts and coaches encumbered

the narrow streets. ‘The coachman,’ said the chronicler, ‘rides behind the horse tails, lasheth them, and looketh not behind him. The drayman sitteth and sleepeth on his dray, and letteth his horse lead him home.’ Yet the miles must have been long indeed, when the horse of every carriage was led by hand, and the drayman slept upon his dray, even in Cheapside !

The river was still the fair highway of London, and the highway it remained for many a year. The citizens took their barges as we take our taxicabs, and read their books or talked with their friends in great content as they passed from Westminster to London Bridge. A pleasanter, more leisurely method of progress could not be imagined. And how noble a spectacle must the Thames have been, packed with brightly painted barges ! But presently, as fashion passed northward from the river, the sedan chair was brought from abroad, and gradually the poor bargeman found himself ousted from prosperity, just as in our day the hansom cab is succumbing

to the swifter motor-car. So evil, indeed, was the plight of the bargeman that an ingenious dramatist, anticipating a later beneficence, proposed that performances should be given in a playhouse in aid of the poor wretches whose occupation was gone.

And still the mile kept its immeasurable length. Travel was dangerous as well as difficult, and a journey from London to Edinburgh entailed more risk and asked more patience than a voyage from Liverpool to New York asks to-day. Then at last what De Quincey called 'the steam kettle' invented a new speed, and set all the world running up and down. Miles were reduced to yards, to feet, and the vast spaces, which once served to separate country from country, were contracted, until Paris was brought to the very door of London, and Moscow, the remote, the inaccessible, seemed far nearer to us than Dublin to our less adventurous forefathers.

But it is not mechanism alone which has annihilated space. In the last century we

have changed all our units of measurement. We have undergone a moral as well as a physical alteration. We are, every one of us, like Dr. Johnson gazing at the shrunken streets of Lichfield. What seemed to our ancestors a noble mansion is in our ambitious eyes a mere cottage. The wealth of our fathers seems poverty to our greed. We pile Pelion upon Ossa, and are not content. We worship excess in whatever shape we find it. To break a record which need not be broken seems of itself a virtuous action. Above all, we worship speed. How proud we are to set out from London, which we have no desire to leave, that we may dine in Paris, which we do not wish to visit ! The reward we get for our excitement is a perpetual confusion of mind. The uncertainty of the traveller is easily intelligible who, sitting in the stalls at the Alhambra, asked his neighbour with perfect politeness whether he was in Paris or London.

So we have decreed in our minds that there shall be no more space, and our

motor-cars and aeroplanes are helping us to put our decree into force. That we shall benefit by the change of manners, which the decree involves, is not likely. For the sake of haste we destroy the variety of life. When Kensington and Chelsea had each its separate existence, when Westminster was a little provincial town gathered round an abbey church, the life of London had a change and colour which it knows no longer. Far distant as Chelsea was, it was not inaccessible, and, if the Londoner of old needed a change of air, he might take the stage, and go with ease and comfort to the Gravel Pits at Kensington. And while he kept for himself the hours, which we now give to trains and motor-cars, he found leisure for thought and study. Unappalled by the penny post, dreaming not of telephones, he might still cultivate the art of letter-writing, and not merely delight his friends with his wit and humour, but send down the ages a lively picture of his times. It is true that he knew by books alone what we, if we

choose, may know by actual observation. But knowledge is like butter on a piece of bread—the more widely it is spread the thinner it becomes.

In brief, may we not pay too high a price for our fierce abolition of space and time? May not the time come, when we shall regret that the mile no longer contains 1760 yards? Shall we not sigh for the simplicity, now vanished in speed, which enabled Peregrine Langton, not much more than a brief century ago, to live in dignity on £200 a year, and keep always a post-chaise and three horses?

XVIII

A WORLD OF UNREST

THE years 1910 and 1911 will be remembered always as years of riot and unrest. Wherever your casual eye was cast the same vision confronted you of revolution and discontent. In Berlin the police was firing upon the mob and sabring British journalists. England was hampered by strikes and locks-out, of which it was not easy to see the end. Her trade unions were prepared to defy the law, merely because a majority of their members found it inconvenient. Discipline and orderliness were at an end. The feeblest Government of modern times attempted to win the support of all the disloyal and disaffected persons, by destroying the Constitution and dismembering the Empire. America took refuge from her troubles in a veiled des-

potism, a form of government which hitherto has not seemed agreeable to 'the greatest Republic on earth.' The weak-minded zealots of India and Egypt, excited by the dangerous eloquence of agitators, persuaded themselves that freedom and murder are synonymous, and revived a wicked and futile policy of bombs.

If we reflect at all upon the state of the world we cannot but be struck by the unanimity of folly and outrage. Men who live under different skies seem to be governed by the same impulses. The passions, which for good or evil sway the human heart, are epidemic. They attack whole peoples, they infect the nerves of vast continents. There is, in truth, nothing so fatally catching as anarchy and riot. They march across the world more swiftly than cholera, and for them unfortunately there is no quarantine.

How is it, then, that in a season of general disaster scarce a country escapes? Let him explain, who understands the subtle transference of thought from crowd to

crowd. Somewhat, no doubt, is achieved by those itinerant preachers, those bagmen of sedition, who wander up and down Europe attending congresses and inflaming the popular mind. But they are not enough of themselves to invent a riot. The most that they can do is to pour oil upon a smouldering fire, and I am not sure that they should not be regarded rather as a symptom than as a cause of disorder. What more is Mr. Keir Hardie, for instance, than a fretful echo of the ignorance and anarchy preached by others ?

And so we are driven to assume that certain periods of the world's history are periods of unrest and lawlessness, that political ideas are, as I have said, catching, like cholera or smallpox. The infection is rapidly and secretly conveyed. No contact of voice and ear is necessary. It is as though insolence and licence were in the air which we breathe, penetrating the very fibre of the people. In brief, the chief lesson of history is the history of recurrent epidemics, which travel by unknown

routes, and which cannot be excluded by the vigilance of Custom Houses.

At the end of the eighteenth century, for instance, there were few corners of the earth that escaped the blight of revolution. From America the subtle poison spread to France, and devastated the country with a wild fury. Nor was the Channel any bar to its progress. England, whose very existence depended on an immunity from the fever, caught it at least in a modified form. Her business it was to act as the doctor of Europe, to fight the disease wherever it made its appearance, and, though she succeeded at last, the cure was delayed because many within her own borders fell to the infection. Thousands of Britons, touched by the malady, called themselves 'citizens,' banded themselves together as 'the Friends of the People,' and promised the abolition of 'all taxes, nobility, and every privilege.' But their frenzy was in vain. Pitt's courage stayed the march of the disease, and Waterloo destroyed the last germs of infection.

A still better example of the rapid spread of political plague was that *annus mirabilis* 1848. As Greville said : ' Revolution, ruin, sickness, and death ravaged the world publicly and privately.' Moral maxims and lofty phrases took the place of virtue and obedience. There was hardly a city in Europe, where the mob did not attempt to overthrow the throne and destroy the basis of civil law. Everywhere the rioters clamoured for a Constitution, and they were best answered by the wise monarch, who proclaimed, amid the wildest enthusiasm : ' You want a Constitution, my children ; you shall have two.' Fervently they believed that only the ignorant and unbridled had a right to reform the State, and they saw in every act of subversion the sublime wisdom of the people. In brief, democracy and philanthropy ' had their own way without let or hindrance,' and they left behind them from one end of Europe to another ' ruin, terror, and despair.'

North and south, east and west, there

was the same tale to tell. While the Fenians threatened the safety of Ireland, while the Chartists did their best to intimidate England, the Continent of Europe seethed with rebellion. Berlin and Paris, Rome and Vienna, were all the scenes of riot and bloodshed. One mind, one ambition (or shall we say one disease ?) was common to the whole of Europe. The fever broke out first here, then there, without warning or apparent cause. It crossed frontiers, and over-passed the loftiest mountains. And, when at last it died out, the wisest physicians could do no more than mark its ravages, and build up anew the shattered Constitutions of Europe with such remedies as care and patience might suggest.

This same mysterious spirit of disease still broods over us all. It travels like news across the desert without any known means of communication. Its mystery and secrecy make it all the harder to fight. There is no cause for it, which statesmanship may remove. We can but wait until

its malevolence is spent, until with equal mystery the peoples of the world are restored to a better health of mind and body. The better health, which politicians call reaction, is sure to come, and we might contemplate the passing fever with equanimity, if we had not learnt by experience that it always leaves the politic body weaker than it found it.

There is, however, no reason for despair. Good counsel as well as evil may be disseminated through the air. It is not disease alone that is passed from nation to nation. There are times when liberty, good order, and repose seem to be the universal inheritance. All that is best and noblest on the earth has travelled from land to land with the same secret, indistinguishable persistence as the poison of politics. The strange stirring of the intelligence, which we call the Renaissance, traversed Europe by no surer route than the atmosphere. There was no reason why every country should join in recovering the ancient spirit of wisdom and beauty.

Yet this same intangible universality of thought, which to-day drives all men to insolence and to folly, once led them in the paths not of anarchy but of culture. Even at the very time when revolution was deluging France with blood a peaceful movement of romance, born in England of the ancient ballads and the odes of Gray, cherished by Wordsworth and Coleridge, was finding its way into France and Germany, and crushing everywhere the formality of an outworn classicism. In brief, the mind has no ramparts and knows no frontiers. And, though for a while intelligence may everywhere suffer eclipse, it will emerge again into the light of heaven, and shine with equal splendour upon all the peoples of the earth.

XIX

STYLE

THE writer who dares to plead the losing cause of Style displays a rare and reckless courage. To demand that the written and spoken word should be marked by 'precision, aptitude, harmony'; in other words, that the orator and man of letters should never forget the imperious claim of artistry sounds like a platitude. It is a platitude, which of late has been obscured by a paradox. We have been told gravely that literary style is not merely an excrescence upon the fair face of thought, but a clear proof of wickedness. Form and matter have been pictured as violent enemies, between whom no reconciliation is possible, and the same sort of suspicion has fallen upon those, who have striven after beauty of style, as they incur who in the

very presence of the Puritan dare to embellish their fading charms with the artifice of rouge-pot and powder-puff.

That perfection of form should be thought blameworthy is due to an absurd confusion of ideas, and is sternly confined to the art of literature. Nobody would blame a sculptor, a painter, or a musician because he strove to make his work beautiful and harmonious. The man of letters has not the same freedom. He is charged by the fool with insincerity if he profess a faith in the paramount necessity of writing well. In England at least the objection to style is a moral not an æsthetic objection. Our critics are not like Stendhal, who declared that he mastered French prose, merely that he might know how not to write it, and thus attain an effect of simplicity. They have heard murmurs of Art for Art's sake, and not understanding those mystical words have thought that an ambition of style should be punished, like other felonies, after trial at the Old Bailey.

It is not strange, therefore, that the very meaning of prose style should have escaped many of our contemporaries. One grave critic has told us that the highest ideal of prose is the ideal of easy conversation; that the man of letters should be content to talk upon paper as he would talk across the dinner-table. Common sense and experience prove this dangerous critic in the wrong. Talk and literature are separated by a whole world of sentiment and purpose. It is a mere accident which forces the two arts to employ the same medium. And he, who would substitute the processes of the one for the processes of the other, would convict himself of as pitiful a confusion as would a sculptor who attempted to fashion a monument in bronze by the rules of painting.

The examples of the masters come to the aid of logic. There is no great writer of prose, who is not a conscious artist in the use of written words, who knows not how to give shape, colour, and substance to his periods. Words may shine like

pigments, or assume a beautifully modelled form as of marble. The splendid pomp of Sir Thomas Browne, the intense, living reality of Defoe, the classical familiarity of Fielding are English prose at its highest. Yet how far remote they are from one another ! And still further remote from the amiable conversation of the tea-table !

There have been many attempts to define style, and none of them satisfactory. We know well what it is not. It is not mere decoration. There are times in which a studied plainness is its essence. It is not something which may be put on and off like a hat. It is a part of a man's being ; it enters into the very fibre of his brain. Above all, it is organic ; it is discernible in the cadence and structure of the language ; it proves the faculties and preferences of the writer. The choice and ordering of words correspond to the character and temperament of him, who selects and sets them forth. And, like all gifts, style is incommunicable. The politician who sug-

gested that a university should enforce its merits asked too much of our seats of learning. A language can be conquered only by the artist himself and in solitude. The examples of the masters may teach something. The lofty tradition of our literature is still a beacon light. But in the end the writer, who has the talent of sincerity, must express himself alone and in his own terms.

The struggle after a perfect style has claimed its victims, like the battlefield. Flaubert, for instance, did himself well-nigh to death in the search for 'the right word.' His hatred of what was obvious and common compelled him to endure a sort of martyrdom. 'I grow so hard to please as a literary artist,' he wrote to a friend, 'that I am driven to despair. I shall end by not writing another line.' And again: 'I am growing peevish about my writing. I am like a man whose ear is true, but who plays falsely on the violin: his fingers refuse to reproduce precisely those sounds, of which he has the inward

sense. Then the tears come rolling down from the poor scraper's eyes, and the bow falls from his hand.' Here are all the elements of a tragedy, and it is a high tribute to the courage of Flaubert that he rose superior to it. He did not cease to write. He found 'the right word,' which should enable him to tell the truth, as the truth was in him, without any faltering or uncertainty of expression. And the victory was worth winning, for it has given him a place among the conquerors. His name will die only with the death of France. And he owes his immortality to style, that mysterious quality which alone gives life to inanimate words. But the martyrdom, which Flaubert endured, is not the universal fate of artists. Some happy ones there are, buoyant of spirit and little critical of self, who leave the impress of their style upon all that they say or write, with light labour, and without the torturing of an eager mind. Benjamin Disraeli, for instance, was an instinctive artist. He

was born in a library, with a pen in his infant hand. His novels have many faults. They are hurried, inconsequent, over-decorated. Yet 'the right phrase' may be surprised on every page, and 'the right phrase' lives for ever in the memories of men.

How different the fate of Mr. Gladstone, who, with his immense volubility, was profuse of words as he was sparing of ideas ! The gift of style was never his. The energy of his mind was unrestrained by any sense of harmony. And his speeches, his books, and his pamphlets are alike unreadable. The truth is that a mere statement has no lasting value. And let them who think that writing is no more than the art of saying something recall an ingenious comparison once made by an eminent scholar. This scholar was criticising the arid manner in which works of art are described in the scientific catalogues which seem to be written by the imbecile for the blind. 'Suppose,' he said, 'the Grecian urn had

been bought by the Museum of Berlin.' The poet's eye saw such visions as these :—

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness !

Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express

A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme :
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,

In Tempe or the dales of Arcady ?

What men or gods are these ? what maidens
loath ?

What mad pursuit ? What struggle to escape ?

What pipes and timbrels ? What wild ecstasy ?

How would the scientific archæologist describe it ? ' Marble vase (Krater). Much chipped ; obverse, man pursuing woman ; reverse, sacrificial scene.' Here are two ways of depicting the same object, and their diversity suggests that style is ever supreme, and that the first and last lesson of literature is the value of words.

XX

‘ THE IDLE RICH ’

ONCE upon a time a turbulent demagogue delivered from the Rev. R. J. Campbell’s pulpit an harangue, which by a bold irony was described as ‘ non-political,’ but which was nothing more than the old familiar appeal to class hatred. In his pleasant way the demagogue denounced ‘ the idle rich,’ who, said he, lead a life of ease at the expense of the community, and to an accompaniment of ‘ applause ’ and ‘ laughter,’ oddly suited to a place of religious worship, he promised to ‘ overhaul ’ the nation and the Empire. ‘ Whatever is done must be bold,’ he declared in a tone which sent a shudder, no doubt, through every idle home in Britain.

Fortunately for the demagogue, it is his business to speak, not to think. Otherwise he might have reflected who and what are

‘the idle rich,’ whom he so bitterly condemned. As a class, they exist only in the pages of the penny novelette or in the careless brain of the mere politician. A rich man may be idle, just as a poor man may be idle. The virtue of industry is not confined to one class, to one creed, or to one age. But the demagogue’s prejudice is obvious. We all know what he means by ‘the idle rich.’ They are the miscreants, who dare to lunch in London clubs, to walk in ‘country lanes, gun at shoulder, dog at heel.’ They are, in brief, the very men, to whom the demagogue and every other Briton owe the profoundest debt of gratitude.

For good or evil England is the creation of ‘the idle rich.’ The class, which the demagogue, in his ‘non-political’ urbanity, would sweep from the earth, has governed, defended, and enlightened the country for many centuries. The history of English politics is (with interludes) the history of ‘the idle rich.’ The policy and firmness, which have given us a place in the world

unrivalled and apart, are the policy and firmness of the hated class. Turn to your annals, regard the great names with respect, and confess that they who bore them would, if they lived to-day, lunch in London clubs, and find their recreation in the shooting of pheasants or in riding to hounds. Cecil and Cromwell, Harley and Bolingbroke and Walpole, Chatham and Pitt and Fox, Melbourne and Gladstone and Disraeli, were descended, one and all, from ‘ the idle rich.’ Yet, however great might have been their temptation to pass their time idly as they did in the golden age, they freely gave themselves to the service of their King and State, and wrote imperishable names upon the tablets of history.

And thousands of their kind, unknown to fame, have spent laborious days in the quiet sacrifice of self. They have sat in Parliament, they have administered justice, they have done the business of the country, ungrudgingly and without reward. They have understood the duties, which privilege entails, and, born to authority, they have

exercised it with wisdom and moderation. Even, when a democratic Government attempted to enrol a citizen army, it was to those, whom our demagogue covers with ridicule, 'the idle rich,' that the Government went for aid. To-day another spirit begins to prevail. Service that is unpaid seems unworthy of acceptance, and when at last the House of Commons, the county councils, the country magistracies, are handed over to greedy office-seekers, who think more of the wage they earn than the nation's profit, the people will perhaps regret its temerity, and sigh for the ancient days, when 'the idle rich' gave themselves and their leisure freely and honourably to the public cause.

As in peace, so in war. The despised class has always been ready to leave its club and its coverts to fight its country's enemies, wherever the sword was drawn. It has spared its blood as little as its energy. The British Empire has been made by the valour of the heroes, whom the Radicals despise, because their skill or fortune has

set them above the necessity of a labourer's wage. Is no debt of gratitude due to John Churchill or Arthur Wellesley ? Shall the narrow prejudice of a class blind us to the gallantry of those, who in Europe as in India, in Egypt as in South Africa, led our armies to victory, and purchased, many of them with their lives, the blessings of a lasting peace ?

‘ The idle rich ’ have done more than this. They have made possible the amenity of our English life. They have built them houses which are still the glory of the land. They have gathered together such treasures of art as all who will may take delight in. They have founded seats of learning, and spent their wealth in the endowment of poor scholars. Neither a country nor a man may live by bread alone, and England, rich in monuments fashioned by the zeal and taste of ‘ the idle rich,’ still holds her own among the civilised nations of Europe. Nor should we forget the wisdom and beneficence of the great landlords, who have gladly shared the misfor-

tunes of their tenantry, and have regarded their acres not as a means of extorting money but as a place of livelihood for the thrifty and industrious.

Our demagogue, in his haste to attain a dismal uniformity, forgets that a country which has no leisured class must ever lack distinction. Where wealth and comfort are crimes, the arts of life must perish of inanition. There is a passage in Gibbon's *Memoirs*, which we commend to the notice of all jealous Radicals. The historian of the Roman Empire was an excellent example of 'the idle rich.' He never raised a hand to earn his bread. As he said himself, 'the gratification of his desires was seldom disappointed by the want of money or credit,' and his affluence enabled him to compose a work which will endure with the English language as a monument of noble style and profound erudition. Our demagogue, no doubt, would have done 'something bold' with this idler, who lived upon the work of others. In complete ignorance of the use to which the idler put his laborious leisure, he would have

turned him out to perform some menial office for which his genius made him totally unfit. But he, who prates in a pulpit of ‘a scandalous and stupid waste of first-class material,’ arrogates to himself a skill and knowledge beyond the reach of human attainment. No man is or has ever been wise enough to decide how this one or that shall spend his days. The whole of human happiness and human distinction depend upon inequality and surprise. ‘The idle rich,’ by the employment of their capital or their brains, contribute more than their share to the national prosperity. Truly, in the length and breadth of England there is room both for rich and for poor. All men set not their hearts upon the same treasure, and the world will be well, until we attain the drab ideal of the new Radicals, which means a barrack and poverty for everybody.

Meanwhile let us remember that as we have no right to despise a man because he is poor, so we have no right to thrust the rich beyond the pale of a tolerant civilisation.

XXI

THE ROMANCE OF LIFE

WHEN Mr. George Wyndham chose to discourse, at Edinburgh, of the springs of romance in the literature of Europe, he selected a theme that is blown about by every wind of controversy. Whence and when poetical romance came to mitigate our dulness will be discussed so long as human curiosity is alive. But the Romance of Life is intelligible to all of us. Here is no ground of argument. Life is romantic at all times and in all seasons. Whether we know it or not, romance follows us from our cradle to the grave. This is no question of literary criticism or of historical doubt. Romance is the common birthright of mankind, and it is our own fault if we do not make the best of it.

There is food for wonder and surprise in every movement of nature. The sun cannot rise nor the moon shine in the sky without imparting a thrill. The torrent 'haunts us like a passion'; the snow-clad mountains lift their tops to heaven with all the enchantment of mystery. Nature does not repeat herself. There is the freshness of an untold fairy story in every thundercloud which obscures her face. And as each year spring grows to summer, and summer fades to autumn, we listen with a new interest to the tale, that has been told a thousand times.

But wonderful and ever changing as is the face of nature, it is man who is the true creature of romance. His first impact with the world is the material of all the great novels that have ever been written. Think what it is to be young and hopeful, and to look out for the first time upon the land which expects its conqueror. 'Adventures are to the adventurous,' and victory is always ready to perch upon the shoulder of the brave man. It matters not which

citadel is to be assaulted ; it matters not which is the weapon of attack—the sword, the pen, the voice. There is still the excitement of uncertainty ; there is still the surprise which waits the generous hero.

In the kingdom of romance are many mansions, not builded all after the same fashion. To some men are allotted the loftier enterprises—to discover unknown seas, to stand upon rocks hitherto untrodden of mortal men, to feel ‘like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken.’ These, whether they know it or not, are the happiest of mortals. They share the thrill of stout Cortez, ‘when with eagle eyes

He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Look’d at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.’

If we had our choice, whose romance would we claim for our own ? Columbus knew a great moment when he saw for the first time the coastline of the new world. The moment would have been greater had he been able to foretell all that the new

world was to suffer and inflict. Napoleon rose to the height of human endeavour when, escaped from Elba, he set his foot once more upon French soil. Wellington, when he fell asleep after the battle of Waterloo, had such an experience as comes to him only who conquers the conqueror of Europe. To win the Derby, 'the blue riband of the turf,' when the jaws of ruin are open to swallow you, is a victory of romance which cannot easily be surpassed in the annals of welcome surprise. And who would not have been Byron, who on the appearance of *Childe Harold* woke up and found himself famous? Or Kean, who after his first triumph at Drury Lane came back to tell his wife that she should ride in her carriage, and that 'Charlie' should go to Eton?

In a competition such as this let who will decide. Every one according to his temperament will know which victory to prefer. But the variety of conquests shows that romance is not necessarily the child of action. There are other things to

discover besides continents. There are other battles to be won besides those which are decided with gun and sword. Two men who marvelled most sincerely at the romance of existence never travelled far from the four walls of their studies. Erasmus, whose battles were all the battles of the spirit, who fought his enemies, sloth and stupidity, at the pen's point, marvelled on his deathbed at 'this miracle of human life.' And Sir Thomas Browne, who did not stray beyond the boundaries of mediæval Norwich, whose discoveries were never more than the discoveries of dead bones and noble words, echoed the marvel of Erasmus. He, too, after many years spent in the quiet curing of the sick and the patient facture of beautiful sentences, acknowledged that there was a romance which he had never fully understood—the marvel of his own retired and peaceful life.

This brings us to the real paradox of romance. They who lead the lives of high endeavour and 'wild surmise' are too often

all unconscious of their good fortune. They have the courage to achieve, but not the mind to understand nor the artistic sense to describe. They spend their years in sublime unconsciousness of what they have accomplished. The salt spray may be in their beards. They may carry in their minds the memory of a wonderful past, and at the first touch of curiosity it all vanishes into thin air. You ask them of islands which only their eyes have looked upon, and they will tell you what they had for breakfast one morning ten years ago. It is not illuminating to you, and yet what would you? The point of view is completely different. The savage ocean is to the sailor a fierce obstacle which it is his business to overcome. He can, if he will, explain with a wealth of technicality what the true meaning of a storm is to him. Shakespeare, no doubt, before he wrote *The Tempest*, had gossiped with many a sailor in the blind ale-houses of Southwark. They told him the stern, hard facts. He turned them with his

magician's wand into the very substance of romance.

So it is that, as we look back on the past, we notice ever this strange divorce. On the one hand are those who have lived romance, on the other are those who have thought it and understood it. In the great age of Elizabeth you may most clearly perceive the two methods at work. The travellers, who went across the sea in search of gold, who lived for its own sake the life of free adventure, took all the marvels which they saw as matters of course, and came home well pleased if only they had added something to their store of wealth. Meanwhile the poets stayed at home, travelling only 'in the realm of thought,' and weaving in the wonderful web of their words the true tapestries of romance. That which the adventurers, celebrated by Hakluyt and Purchas, saw and achieved, Shakespeare and his fellows set to immortal music. Here is no literal interpretation. It is but the mere spirit of enterprise, which passes from the page of solid fact

into the drama of many-coloured imagination. The romance, which one has lived, another translates with a splendid freedom into the language of poetry. Thus it has ever been. Thus will it ever be. Mankind will still marvel at the romance which confronts it; and even the scholar, who has never passed beyond the four walls of his sequestered study, will still applaud, as the breath leaves his body, the miracle of our human life.

XXII

ACTION AND REACTION

MR. ASQUITH, at the instance, I hope, of a quickened conscience, once propounded a doctrine which, coming from him, had deep significance. ‘The course of our constitutional progress,’ said he, ‘has been in the main not an alternation of revolution and reaction, but a course of more or less even development.’ This is a theory which consoles the apostle of change at any price. The weak Minister, who cannot control the discordant elements of his party; the noisy breaker of images, who believes that all which is new is sanctified, find comfort, no doubt, in this pretence of development. History gives them no support. Its one indisputable lesson is that every revolution is a disaster; that reaction alone avails to save us from the pit of anarchy.

Abroad as at home the two forces are perpetually at work. The insensate orgy of blood and madness, known as the French Revolution, would have ruined the fair land of France for ever, had not the greatest reactionary of all time, the man of iron hand and tyrant's brain, appeared in the nick to assert his sovereignty. The English Revolution of 1832, which was to make the Whigs the masters of Britain for life, opened the way to the domination of Peel. The last half century has been a period of reaction against the ambition of plunder and rapine cherished in the 'fifties. Even in this very heyday of Radical government, we have not travelled so far on the road of theft as the stalwarts of '52. Said the satirist of that inauspicious year:—

Theft, my friend, the gods have pity on thy
weak and watery brain!

How can they who own the total steal a por-
tion? pray explain.

Men in Nature's state are equal: property con-
ferred by laws,

From the sanction of the people all its rights
and safeguards draws.

You but hold it at their pleasure, you must
yield it at their summons.

And the pleasure of the people, seek it in the
House of Commons.

Thus was the gospel of the flaunting demagogue preached in identical terms fifty years ago, and it will presently be driven into oblivion again by the wisdom of reaction and the logic of facts. We can but hope that the old and necessary lesson will be taught us by less violent means. Then nothing less than the Crimean War and the Mutiny in India would have steadied the nerves in England. In face of a peril, for which they were unprepared, even the prophets of theft changed their policy, even 'the broad-brimmed hawker of holy things, whose ear was crammed with his cotton,' ceased to preach down 'our poor little Army.' In brief, reaction came in an instant, and brought with it the only method of safety.

As in politics, so in the arts, reaction and revolution alternate. Those who are debauched with the spirit of novelty and

irreverence do not 'crib, cabin, and confine' their energies in one profession. The temperament, which sees nothing sacred in an honourable constitution, cheerfully flouts the example of the masters. The artistic iconoclast has no spark of respect in his heart for any save himself and his cenacle. He would cut, if he could, all the trammels which bind him to the past. He believes that originality consists in breaking the established rules of his craft, in doing something different from the others. Originality is not so easily come by. The most of literary experiments are made in vain. For eccentricity is no part of genius, and he is the true original, who learns how to express something of himself with the old means and in the old materials.

Schools rise and fall, and each generation hopes against hope that it has solved for the first and last time the problem of literature. Thirty years ago what Zola called 'Naturalism' appeared to the revolutionary the one and only method of expression. The notebook was pronounced the

sole repository of fiction. Industrious novelists gathered 'facts' and ransacked the files of forgotten newspapers, confident that truth lay not in the bottom of a well, but in the annals of the police court. And so facts, true in themselves, were turned to falsehood by being packed together between two covers; imagination was banished from the field of letters; and the statistician appeared to a sedulous generation the only real poet in prose. Then 'Naturalism' was carried a step farther. Finding crimes more easy to be discovered than virtues, its professors neglected all such facts as were not scandalous, and attempted to persuade us that nothing happened in town or country that did not deserve punishment either in gaol or at the gallows.

The reaction was swift, and dire the vengeance wreaked upon the Naturalists. The Symbolists, in scorn of a false reality, returned to the ancient paths of poetry. They believed it was the poet's duty, in prose or verse, to evoke beautiful images, and to clothe simple themes in noble and

expressive words. Once more reaction saved the world of letters from anarchy.

Paris has always been the home of artistic movements. The arts are followed and esteemed in her nimble atmosphere with a keener zest and a graver sincerity than beneath our clouded sky. Sometimes the humour which would kill with laughter a vain experiment is lacking; but this seriousness is but a defect of a splendid quality, and it permits us to contemplate at our leisure the constant triumph of reaction. London still remembers a famous exhibition which should have taught a salutary lesson to revolutionaries of all kinds. Certain Winston Churchills of painting or their patrons set themselves recklessly to show what might be done by an open contempt of tradition. Post-Impressionists they were called by the interested persons who gathered their experiments together. They could not have justified any name that was chosen for them, since they had no adherence, no common aim. They were complete

strangers one to the other. The best of them were dead before the others had taken brush in hand. They agreed in one thing only, in the expression of scorn for the conservative temper, which is essential to the artist. Other men have learnt how to draw. It was for them, therefore, to neglect the difficult lesson. The splendour of colour has been revealed to many masters. Let them, then, prove themselves colour-blind. What hope is there for them in following the path trodden by Holbein and Rembrandt, by Titian and Velazquez? None whatever. So with a face of brass they pretended to forget the lessons of all the ages, that they might win the crown of originality.

MM. Van Gogh, Matisse, and the other post-impressionists, these anarchists of the brush, having achieved a success of scandal or curiosity, passed away speedily into the lumber of forgotten things. They will not keep a line in the history of the craft whose laws they outraged. And they do no harm even to that craft. A breath

of reaction sends them out of sight, and in the ridicule which overtakes them the glory of the masters is re-established. The anarchists of politics are not thus innocuous. The false doctrines which they preach, the false hopes of plunder which they hold out to their dupes, still exert a baleful influence. It is true that the reaction is sure to come, the more violent on account of the violence of the revolution ; but it will not come before the nation has been weakened, before a wanton injustice has been done to innocent men. Meanwhile I refuse to believe in the comfortable doctrine of ‘an even development.’ That would rob us of all hope for the future. The path of safety is the path of retreat, and the sooner we turn our back upon the present the surer will be England’s fate in an ultimate victory.

XXIII

THE END OF EDUCATION

THE determined assault which every day is made upon education is part of the general conspiracy to sever the last link which binds the present to the past. The headmasters who from time to time sit in conclave make no attempt to defend the studies which they direct. They resolutely refuse the guidance which we have a right to expect from them. Their position is that of the humble democrat. They are willing to grant whatever is asked, to abolish whatever seems distasteful to the idlest of their pupils ; and if they follow their present policy of complaisance, in five years England will be illiterate as well as lawless.

Hitherto the attack has been cunningly directed upon Greek, which Mr. Carnegie and other specialists have pronounced as

of no more value than Choctaw. The unfamiliar characters, employed by the ancient Greeks, seem an open affront to the champions of popular mediocrity. Why should those arrogant persons, it is asked, have presumed to reject an alphabet, which serves all the purposes of the free and enlightened voter? Why should Homer and Sophocles have wantonly separated themselves from the British proletariat? Indeed, there seems no valid reason for their impudence, and Greek, in the eyes of the friends of progress, is as roughly condemned as the House of Lords itself.

But the assailants of Greek forget that their attack involves all studies known to our schools, either humane or scientific. If Greek be abolished every other subject, which exacts discipline or presents difficulty, must be abolished with it. The single argument which the enemies of education have advanced against the humanities is that the humble student, who devotes his hours and days to their study, has not time to learn a great deal about them. He gets

but a smattering, which profits him nothing in the stern fight of existence. And they do not see, these enemies of education, that they are arguing not against Latin and Greek but against knowledge in every shape and form. The smatterer is not confined to the classics. A brief course of chemistry, a casual acquaintance with Shakespeare, the knack of speaking a few barren sentences of French and German—these pass with the passing of school, and leave behind them no trace of thought or discipline.

As the headmasters refuse to impose their views upon their pupils, it is left for the parents of the pupils to take the lead. And the parents are resolutely opposed to every form of culture upon the simple ground, that ‘it will be of no use to my son in his future career.’ One headmaster has assured us that every subject in his curriculum has been condemned upon this irrelevant ground. A stern demand has been made upon him to abolish Greek, Latin, Algebra, Mathematics generally,

French, German, Natural Science, English, and Scripture. The demand varies according to the taste and fancy of the parent. The reason given is always the same: 'It will be of no use to my son in his future career.'

What will be 'of use to my son in his future career' is clear enough. The future career of the unfortunate boy is rigidly circumscribed. In accordance with the mean ideals of to-day the beginning and end of every career should be either a balance at a bank or complete immunity from any trying or serious work. The boy, whom his parents would zealously defend from the irksomeness of the classics, mathematics, and science will probably devote his arid life to exchanging with colleagues, narrow as himself, telegrams about stocks and shares. He will know when to buy and when to sell. And for the satisfaction of this high purpose Greek and Latin, mathematics and chemistry, are alike useless. We can imagine nothing which will serve this young hero save the rudiments

of reading and writing, and an early initiation into the mysteries of the Stock Exchange.

He, who keeps an eye fixed resolutely upon 'his future career,' should remain no longer at school than will satisfy the law of the land. The monster who, even in childhood, prefers profit to education would, if our headmasters were wise, find no place in a public school. He and his parents misunderstand the sole purpose of education, which is discipline. It is not for the amount of Latin and Greek, which boys carry away with them from school, that the humanities are worth all the respect we can pay to them. It is for the admirable training which they impart to the intelligence.

And what would these champions of the 'future career' at all costs substitute for the humanities? A smattering of arithmetic, just enough to understand to-day's 'quotations,' and a distant knowledge of French and German, not the French and German, which might unlock two noble

literatures, but the French and German, which every waiter speaks in a cosmopolitan hotel. The fine flower of modern training was once heard disporting himself in a Swiss tavern, and this is what he said : ' Zwei Eier, bien cuits, and mind they are.' It is not the language of Heine or Racine, but it is what passes current as German and French among those, who, despising Greek and Latin, look only at what may serve their ' future career.'

I do not care to think what will be the product of our schools, when they have renounced all semblance of learning, and have settled down comfortably and infamously to consider nothing but the ' future career ' of their victims. We shall see grow up in our midst a race of men which dreams money, talks money, writes money, all day long. They will have larger motor-cars, these gentlemen, than their fathers, and they will drink more champagne. But what kind of citizens will they make ? Without the slightest knowledge of the past, with no gift of foreseeing the future,

they will live wholly in the present ; they will consider nothing else than their own profit. Poor in all those things of the mind, which their grandfathers deemed worthy of reverence, they will be rich in pocket, and their riches will bring them neither happiness nor respect. Nor, until death overtakes them, will they ever reflect that anything save gold is worth a sacrifice.

Now the perfect education aims at making something better than a money-getter. It regards the happiness and intelligence of the individual. It does not aspire to make a lawyer or a mechanic, or a thrifty employer of labour. Much daring, it hopes (or hoped, for it is dead or dying) to make a man. It insisted that all who came under its sway should, for once in their lives, know the pleasures of the imagination, and realise what it was to bask in the sun of unprofitable knowledge. If Latin and Greek availed nothing in the dull science of making an empty pocket full, at least they promised their loyal disciples a brief sojourn in an enchanted land, they un-

locked a secret door into a world of gaiety and wisdom, they revealed the true source of our noblest poetry and our profoundest philosophy. Then might we not, if we followed this real education, wrestle a fall with Time himself, and call back to life the heroes of a dead age ?

But, interposes the one-sided master of us all, education of this kind will be useless if tried by the standard of the city ; its very uselessness is its best justification. The perfectly disciplined mind can be turned upon every human enterprise with success. The mind, which is fashioned from the beginning for one, and only one, purpose is crushed by a single failure ; and the old system, now passing away, was, I believe, of better profit as well as more honourable than that, which our timid headmasters are willing to accept. But the ancient discipline is the very element in our education, which to-day appears detestable. The aim of modern life is that nobody should do anything that he does not want to do. The boy finds Greek

irksome. Why should it be inflicted upon him ? The murderer resents the gallows. What an infamy it is that his fear of death should be outraged ! The unemployed hate nothing so much as the chance of a day's work. Therefore it is indelicate to offer them a job. And when, at last, we have reached the Radical millennium, in which nobody is punished for the worst crime with anything heavier than a penny reading (and magic-lantern slides), in which the schoolboy chooses what he will condescend to learn, and in which the loafer is driven to labour merely by boredom, we may regret those honester days which thought that idleness was not the highest good, and that there was still a greater happiness than indiscipline.

XXIV

GOSSIP

Gossip is a penalty of greatness, a penalty which only the greatest of all may escape. The love of irrelevancy has not laid a foolish hand upon Chaucer. Though we know more of Shakespeare than of any of his contemporaries save Ben Jonson, his Olympian brow is scarce touched by scandal. These poets, perhaps, transcend the habit of human thought, and an involuntary reverence holds them sacred. And of those that might fall an easy prey to the gossip-monger many escape by an accident of fortune. The immaterial story of Keats is happily writ in water. He comes before the judgment bar of posterity with nothing in his hand save a book of immortal verse.

Others, his contemporaries, have fared

more evilly. Byron and Shelley are enthroned upon the topmost pinnacle of curiosity. Everything that they said or did seems of the vastest importance to thousands, who never read a line of their poetry. For many years the best method of studying English literature has seemed to be to collect 'chatter about Harriet Shelley.' Idle readers by the score have sat, like a crowner's quest, upon her hapless remains. They have taken sides in the tragedy ; they have arrogantly apportioned the praise and blame. Every shred of Shelley's writing has been treasured, transcribed, and printed, not because it was of interest, but because it flatters the prevailing love of gossip. The poet's letters, which reveal an unexpected aptitude for business, and for the rest are not of much import, have been piously gathered and presented to the world, and the busybodies, who have done all this, are possibly unconscious of casting any slur upon the fame of a great poet.

Yet slur it is, for Shelley, of all men,

should have been exempt from prying eyes. We like to think of him as a disembodied spirit, an immortal child, 'gold-dusty from tumbling amidst the stars'; and then the gossip intervenes, with his scraps rescued from the broken heap of the past, laying bare the secret places of the poet's life, and opening to the common eye what the poet would most resolutely have concealed. Byron, on the other hand, may bring a charge of indiscretion against nobody. He was never so happy as when his name was in the mouths of men. He was, so to say, the architect of his own reputation. He rejoiced unfeignedly on the day that he awoke and found himself famous. He would be known not merely as a poet but as a man of fashion, and, not content with creating his works, he created himself also, a strange monster of recklessness and daring, who first touched the imagination of the people, and then aroused the fury of all good prudes. There is no meaner episode in our social history than the fierce ostracism of Byron. The poet was

driven forth, insulted, stoned by the very persons, who had most loudly acclaimed his genius, and who most noisily affected to admire his daring in life and art. Yet the pity you give to Shelley you withhold from Byron. Did not Byron stimulate and encourage the noisy applause which speedily turned to his own dishonour?

It is commonly said that the fame bred of gossip does not persist long after the death of the victim. Nothing can be further from the truth. Shelley died in 1822, Byron two years later, and the curious are as eager as ever they were to pry into the hidden places of their lives. After the lapse of nearly a century it is still thought worth while to print a collection of Trelawny's letters, edited by Mr. Buxton Forman, with all the care usually reserved for an ancient text; and nothing save the survival of the legends, which have grown about the names of Byron and Shelley, could justify or explain their publication. Trelawny was a bluff old gentleman who wrote one excellent book—*The Adventures*

of a Younger Son—but that is not enough to keep green his memory. However, he knew both the poets ; he made love with varying ardour to Mary Shelley and Claire Clairmont. The names, sacred to those who profess the cult, bristle in his pages. Here is the twice told tale of the burning of Shelley's body, of the poet's heart which no flame could consume ; there is the poor man's ' degrading reflection ' that so weak and ignoble a soul as he thought Byron's ever influenced him ! And when we lay the book aside, we have acquired nothing from it but an uncomfortable feeling of indiscretion. What right have we to read the love-letters of a man, whom we never knew, and who has lain in the grave no more than thirty years ? When Trelawny poured forth what there was in him of a heart to Mary Shelley or to Claire, he meant the effusion for their eyes alone. Shall we, then, look with so small an excuse into the secrets of a stranger ?

It is not easy to understand this passion for the discovery of other men's affairs.

It comes, in the unlearned, from a common curiosity. The restless mind, which cannot leave a letter unopened upon a table, finds a pleasure in reading the faded correspondence of men and women dead and gone. And then gossip about poets is an easy substitute for learning. The number of those, who take a genuine delight in the art of poetry, is few indeed. 'Prometheus Unbound' still remains a riddle untried to the vast majority. But any one can pretend a fashionable acquaintance with Shelley, who has turned over the pages of some ardent biography, and who can declare with amazing wisdom that he does not like the way in which Shelley treated his first wife. It does not occur to this reader that his experiment in posthumous eavesdropping carries him leagues away from the poet's works, makes it impossible that he should ever appreciate the splendour of the poet's thought, the music of the poet's verse. As for Shelley, 'he dances in and out of the gates of Heaven; its floor is littered with his broken fancies.'

And the industrious reader asks, ' Was he happy with Mary ? '

Yet the notoriety that fate has contrived for Shelley is regarded by many a poeticule of to-day, by many a patient spinner of prose, as the summit of ambition. If only he can win the notice of his fellows, the poeticule is willing to make the last sacrifice of dignity. To be known is to be famous, and what matters it, says he, how or by what you are known ? If the world will not applaud, he will go into the market-place and blow aloud his own trumpet ; he will cut such antics in the sight of all that men must ask in indolent curiosity who he is. Nor, for the acquisition of fame, which to-day may swiftly be translated into success, need a man write, or make, or discover anything for himself. It is enough to boast an acquaintance with him who writes, makes, or discovers something. And so there grow up among us friends of the great, resolute men, who follow their victims stealthily, pack their notebooks with the victims' innocent

sayings, and are ready when the time comes with a biography. Thus it is that gossip obscures achievement, and we sigh in vain for that golden age, in which poets were revered only for the songs, which they sang, and in which their faces, honourably muffled, were hidden from the anxious gaze of the people.

XXV

SENTIMENTALISM AND CRIME

OF late years our legislators have considered far too amiably the susceptibilities of the criminal. The law-abiding citizen appears a dull thing in their eyes. With a sort of Pharisaism they have applauded their own generosity and broadmindedness. Other nations have very properly refused the right of asylum to murderers and housebreakers. Here was an admirable opportunity to prove that the English Radical was not as the politicians, who control the destinies of the European Continent. The Aliens Act, faulty enough in theory, was made in practice of small effect, in order that our Ministers, warming their hands before the fire of vainglory, might boast that every man was free who had once set foot upon the sacred soil of England.

And thus London has become the refuge, the rubbish heap of the world. The criminal, driven by a wise justice from Berlin or Paris, knows that he will meet with the profound sympathy of the English Radical, who will sob over the hardships which he has undergone in the past, and denounce as a cruel inquisition the legitimate interference of the police. In this sympathy there is neither justice nor reason. It is born not of sentiment but of sentimentalism. It is the mad expression of the democratic idea that men are equal, that there is no difference between genius and mania, between intelligence and imbecility, between virtue and vice. All men are free to do as they will, shouts the sentimentalist. The right of punishment belongs to none. The sole enemy of the State is the law-abiding, thrifty citizen, who goes about his work and harms nobody. If it were not for him the criminal would not be driven to sin. He it is, who denies the opportunity of an honest career to the weaker brethren. Therefore let him

take the consequences, and, if he be plundered and killed, he gets no more than the proper wages of his prosperity.

It is not merely the alien, who is looked upon with this kindly eye by our legislators. The modern attitude towards crime of every kind is an attitude of genial complaisance. Our sentimentalists profess a profound hatred for the suffering of others, though it be righteously inflicted. Their weak nerves twitch at the thought of a harsh punishment, which conflicts with their general theory that all men and women should be permitted to do precisely what they please without fear of consequences. Recognising that it is not fair to accept the verdict of 'the opposite party,' they agree with Jonathan Wild that a robber should be tried by a jury of his fellow-craftsmen. They demand that the principle of the franchise should be applied to the administration of justice. Let every man choose his own method of punishment. If the gallows affright him there is poison at his elbow. If he

dislike solitary confinement, let him mingle freely with his fellows. When he is weary of reading, comfort him with lectures, and permit him to carry away from his prison a mixed memory of picked oakum, if so harsh a task be still imposed, and popular astronomy.

The prevailing sentimentality is pure egoism. It springs from self-pity, not from pity of others. The poor philanthropist, who expresses it, fears only the effect that prison and hard labour might have had upon himself. His imagination cannot carry him so far as the thoughts and feelings of the criminal. That gentleman, we make no doubt, looks upon the sentimentalist with a kind of amused contempt. He knows perfectly well how to play his game. He will take every advantage that is offered him, he will smile at the irresolution of the foolish persons, who wish to spare and pamper him, and then, if he be captured in fair fight, he will pay the penalty without wincing. 'Poor fellow,' murmurs the philanthropic

legislator, 'if only he had had my advantages, he would not be lying in a dank cell; he would be passing laws for the benefit of his kind.' Perhaps he would, and in the scrimmage that would follow there would be an end of justice and society.

The sentimentalist is still unconvinced. For justice he cares as little as for society. The commonplaces of mercy still engross his errant mind, and it matters not to him who suffers for his tears. He is no new thing in the experience of England. He recurs at fixed periods, and then is put away again until a fresh access of weeping shakes the country. Carlyle knew him and described him in terms which are ever fresh: 'A foolish stump-orator, perorating on his platform mere benevolences, seems a pleasant object to many persons; a harmless or insignificant one to nearly all. Look at him, however; scan him till you discern the nature of him; he is not pleasant, but ugly and perilous. That beautiful speech of his takes captive every long ear, and kindles into quasi-sacred

enthusiasm the minds of not a few : but it is in the teeth of the everlasting facts of this universe, and will come to mischief for every party concerned. . . . Long-eared fellow-creatures, more or less resembling himself, answer, “ Hear, hear ! Live, Fiddle-string, for ever ! ” Whereupon follow Abolition Congresses, Odes to the Gallows, perhaps some dirty little Bill.’ So to-day, when crime flourishes upon the sympathy of our rulers, the sentimentalist again clamours for the free entry of aliens into London, and demands in the name of liberty that what is called ‘ politics ’ should still be the impenetrable cloak of violence.

Another form assumed by the present sentimentalism is a morbid fear of death. Whatever happens no drop of blood must be shed. If men or women be murdered, that cannot be helped, and the less said about it the better. The criminal stands upon another foot, and is entitled to every consideration. Nor in arresting him must the lightest risk be run. The valiant policeman, who is as willing now as he

always was to face danger, must be protected by the sentimentalist against his own valour. And in this nervousness the police has not the smallest share. We can easily imagine the shame and anger of the men who are not permitted to avenge their comrades. Pistols may be matched with pistols, and if policemen are not restrained there is no miscreant, who may not be brought to justice and forced to expiate his sins upon the scaffold.

Meanwhile the sentimentalism of our legislators can be interpreted by the desperate aliens, welcomed to our shores, in one sense only—in the sense of weakness. In the eyes of the hardened assassin, pity is weakness, the fear of death is weakness, a light sentence is weakness. Irrelevant philanthropy meets with no heartier contempt than with those upon whom it is lavished. Sympathy with the criminal evokes not gratitude but the laughter of cynicism. And we shall not suppress the anarchy, which reigns in our midst, until we close our ports against the murderer,

who affects an interest in politics, until we understand that the suppression of crime, not the indulgence of a lachrymose sentimentalism, is the purpose of the law-maker.

‘ There is but one thing needed in the world,’ said Carlyle, ‘ but that one is indispensable. Justice, justice in the name of Heaven ; give us justice, and we live ; give us only counterfeits of it, or succedanea for it, and we die ! ’

XXVI

LIBRARIES

THE dispersing of a famous library is as grievous a spectacle as the destruction of an ancient building. For a collection of books, if they be gathered with taste and knowledge, is a living, organic whole. When once they are disparted one from another, they have no more power to excite our wonder than the scattered stones of a demolished cathedral. But while they are arranged in all the glory of sumptuous bindings upon a shelf, who so churlish as to grudge the proximity which enhances their value? Who would not feel pleasure to see a band of old contemporaries, long severed by the chances of time and place, brought together in decent companionship?

Thus all, save the rich and intrepid book-

hunter, will regret the doom now too frequently pronounced upon great libraries. The treasures garnered with a wise and lavish zeal fall presently to the cruel music of the hammer. All the hopes that were flattered in their chase, all the pride that throbbed at their acquisition, are dashed for ever. The noble edifices raised by patient and discerning hands crumble to the earth. Old friends which met last, maybe, in the shops of Caxton, Wynkyn de Worde, or Berthelet are once more scattered to the ends of the earth, and nought remains to mark their passage save costly catalogues, those grave monuments and sepulchres of dead libraries.

Two noble libraries, patiently gathered and sadly dispersed in our own day, will point the moral. I know not to which of the two collectors the palm shall be awarded. Happily, they were not fired by precisely the same ambition, and those, who knew that the masterpieces of the one collection were far beyond their reach, might still have cherished a faint hope

of making a modest capture at the other. Henry Huth recognised that no treasure was outside the scope of his purse and courage. He gave chase to whatever was rare with the intrepidity of a hunter. The works of Caxton, the folios of Shakespeare, the finest spoils of the early Venetian presses, were the legitimate conquests of his bow and spear. And wisely counselled, he sought far and wide for broadsides, tracts, and pamphlets, for those strange wild-fowl of literature which graver scholars are wont to despise. Here, indeed, he achieved a triumph, a triumph which he gladly shared with the world, and it is not too much to say that by recovering and reprinting the prose works of Dekker, Greene, Nashe, and the rest, he manifestly increased our knowledge of the Elizabethan age.

Mr. Hoe's aim was less high and no less worthy. Though he did not quail before Italian manuscripts, or miracles of early printing, he found his chief joy in possessing the first editions of English masterpieces,

and so well did he succeed in his pursuit that his catalogue, as those who have consulted it well know, is a handbook of bibliography. If he captured less rarities than Henry Huth he covered a wider field ; his collection was the collection of one, who not only bought but read, and it would have been difficult to imagine a pleasanter prison wherein to be shut up than the library of Mr. Hoe. For there is a delight in early editions of which no lover of books need be ashamed. We all know the bluff, hearty fellow who is perfectly content with modern echoes of ancient books. ' Give me a plain reprint,' says he, ' that's good enough for me.' That is precisely what it is : it is good enough for him. It is not good enough for those, who would recover from their books the very tone and accent of dead writers.

The truth is that the best of reprints is but the pale reflection of its original. From this travesty of an ancient book the spirit and substance of the past are gone. The old print, the gold-toned paper, the ancient

sheep-skin cover, show you the book as it appeared to the hero that wrote it. It is in such type as this, you say, that he read his proofs. The simple frontispiece was of his choice. The printer, whose name stands at the foot of the title-page, was his friend and colleague. Are not all these indications of his mind and temper? Can you not catch an added vision of the man himself, when you look at the outward show of the book as he saw and approved it?

If books are worth reading, they are worth reading at their best and in their handsomest shape. True, it is a delight to read *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, even in a new garb. It is a far keener delight to turn over the pages of the quarto of 1621, which Burton himself handled and conned for the press. The commentators no doubt, have illuminated the text of Hobbes with their later wisdom, but you will better understand the author, if you turn the pages of the edition, across whose title-page strides the Leviathan with sword

in one hand and crozier in the other. And as for Chaucer, how shall he be read and understood save in black letter? Cold does our *English Homer* look in the neatness of modern print, and noble was the compliment which Burton paid him, when he set all citations from his works in Gothic type.

Nor do the pleasures of book-hunting lie only in the splendour of the quarry. There is also the pleasure, vivid and inexhaustible, of the chase. Mighty men indeed were the old hunters. They gave their days and nights to the sport. Gladly would they travel from end to end of Great Britain, gladly would they cross the inhospitable sea, if only they might track to its lair a single treasure. How great must have been the satisfaction of the Duke of Roxburghe, when he was able to produce the first edition of Boccaccio, printed at Venice in 1474, which his friends had assured him had no existence! And if from the land of shades he could watch the dispersing of his books, his ghost must

have worn a boastful smile, when the Boccaccio for which he paid £100 passed to a rival for £2260. Truly, in those brave days, the hunting of books was sport for kings. The collector knew well every treasure that his library contained. The fatigue of the search, the glory of the capture, were all his own, and he did not hide his acquisitions from his friends. ‘Why, you see, sir,’ said Richard Heber, who had a hoard of books in every city of Europe, ‘no man can comfortably do without three copies of a book. One he must have for a show copy; . . . another he will require for his own use and reference; . . . and he must needs have a third at the service of his friends.’

To-day, alas! another fashion prevails. With high prices a spirit of piracy has crept into the saleroom. The collector sends forth his agents to lay harsh hands upon whatever money can buy, and, when he has gathered together books and manuscripts, good or bad, which should never find an incompatible shelter under one roof,

he carries them off to his secret fastness, where wise eyes may not look upon them. But he is no true conqueror, who owes his victory to gold alone, and the honours of war still remain with the scholar of old, whose taste told him what he should acquire, and who fought himself for its possession even at the auction's mouth.

XXVII

EXAMINATIONS

ONE of the worst of the legacies which have come down to us from the nineteenth century is the legacy of competitive examination. This, the strangest method of choosing officials ever devised by the ingenuity of man, possesses all those qualities, which were cherished by our simple forefathers. It appears logical at first sight. It has an air of scrupulous fairness. The logic falls to pieces when the premises are found to be false. And no one can praise the fairness of a system, which sets out to discover wise men, and chooses those only who have learned the trick of deceiving their examiners.

However, for many years England has rivalled China in the waste and multiplicity of examination. We have examined our

soldiers, we have examined our civil servants at home and abroad. If a new office be created, now a daily occurrence, the poor, silly candidates are driven into a pen and asked irrelevant, bewildering questions. Thus there is one avenue, and one avenue alone, to preferment. A long room, lightly furnished with tables and benches, with red blotting-paper, foolscap, and quill pens, represents to many a loyal servant the hard-travelled road to Empire. Those, who look back upon the experience of their youth, smile at the foolish game they were asked to play. But what can be said in extenuation of a Government, which needs the best service that it can obtain, and resolutely applies a false test ? To seek the governing spirit in an examination room is like looking for a Derby winner in a circus.

No sooner were examinations invented than human ingenuity discovered how to evade them. In other words, the new disease instantly found a suitable remedy. The crammer came to the candidate's aid,

and made it certain that the examiners should test not his knowledge, not his intelligence, but his cunning. Thus the candidate was stuffed, fat as a Strasburg goose, with multifarious information; he studied 'tips' in history and algebra with the interested zeal of a racecourse tout. He knew that, if once he could amass a certain number of marks, he would be beyond the reach of poverty all his life long. And at every step he took on the way to success he separated himself further from the possibility of a clear understanding. There is nothing better than a wise education for the making of public servants. Again and again it has been proved that they are most capable of Empire who in their youth have followed scholarship for its own sake. But those are not the men, who shine most brilliantly in the examiner's room. They have not been trained to cram their brains with hastily gathered lumber, and then to unpack it all and for ever within the compass of a busy fortnight.

In the old days a more prudent method of selection prevailed. Those who had influence, whether Ministers or directors, did not scruple to make an intelligent choice among their friends. There is much to be said in favour of a system which gave Clive and Warren Hastings to India. It is easy to believe that, under our present rules, Arthur Wellesley, 'idle and inattentive in his studies,' would not have been given a chance of military distinction. So honest a man might perchance have shrunk from the trickery of examination, and wasted his talents in some civil employ. Are we sure even that Nelson would have found admission to the Navy, had not an uncle been willing and able to set him on his way from a Norfolk vicarage to the quarter-deck of the *Victory*?

That England, in spite of an evil system, has accomplished her many noble designs is the highest possible tribute to the excellence of her material. Her servants, whether chosen by influence or by examination, have known how to do their duty and

to uphold the dignity of the Empire. They have also been able, many of them with the passage of the years, to outgrow the evil effects of cram. Beneath other skies they have rid themselves of a foolish incubus and have forgotten in the responsibilities of high office that they ever stooped, with the aid of a crammer, to assume a knowledge which they did not possess.

But, because examination has not wholly checked the growth of our English intelligence, there is no reason why we should continue to hold it in respect. Indeed, there are hopeful signs of a return to better counsels. Mr. Hartog, a sound authority, has publicly deplored, before the Society of Arts, the hideous waste of national energy imposed by the Civil Service. He has drawn a pitiable picture of the overworked, under-educated candidate, who spends a large part of his life in attempting to attain the end of a paltry ambition. If he be successful, he must still deplore the loss of squandered years. If he fail, he has packed his brain for nothing, and

must begin life again, stripped of knowledge and with a warped intelligence. And he fails as often as not. In one single year there were some two hundred thousand candidates at public examinations in the United Kingdom, and only one hundred thousand won the posts which they coveted. With these facts in our mind, shall we dare to reproach China, the reckless mother of examinations, with sacrificing her national energy ?

Meanwhile Lord Cromer has made a definite experiment, which has been crowned with success. He has appointed a board of 'highly qualified officials,' who are left free to choose from the universities such candidates for the Sudanese Service as they think fit. The plan has worked admirably, and there is no reason, save one, why this same plan should not be applied to every service at the disposal of the Government. The one reason in its disfavour is the jealousy and inverted snobbishness which prevail to-day. The class hatred recently stirred up has thrown a slur of suspicion

upon all well-educated men. The Labour Party has discovered that political virtue resides only in manual toil. It has even made a demand that it should be represented upon the Indian Council, though its ignorance of our great dependency is as profound as its ignorance of the art of government. It is not likely, therefore, to approve of any scheme, which should find the properly qualified servants of the Empire in our universities. There is for the moment a taint on education. He is instantly suspected of incompetency, who by industry and intelligence has raised himself above his fellows. The horny hand of toil is represented as alone fit for government, because a compact body of some forty members believe itself able to intimidate weak Cabinets. And as the horny hand may not yet grasp all the reins it will do its best to impede the coach of Empire. The competitive system appears to those, who have not realised its dangers, a symptom of democracy. Here, says the horny-handed one, there is no favour, and

he is likely to give the system a qualified support, until all the offices in the State are handed over to his free disposal. And thus we see the great danger of all democracies. Fear and distrust are eternal stumbling-blocks in the way of just selection. That an able man should be placed where his ability might be useful seems to the people an open affront. In Athens, where at last the democracy involved the State in ruin, they chose their magistrates by lot. We choose the most of our public servants by examination. Which method is the wiser ? I am not sure that the toss of a coin is not preferable.

XXVIII

FAME

‘FAME,’ said a philosopher some years ago, ‘is a very subtle thing. If you neglect it, it will not come to you. Now, I propose to win it by asking the distinguished Americans who visit London to dine with me.’ Whether the Americans ate their dinner, and the philosopher attained his end it boots not to inquire. The lapse of time has proved fame, the object of many men’s desire, to be far less subtle than once it was. The curiosity and indiscretion of the age in which we live have rendered it indistinguishable from notoriety and advertisement. To be in the mouths of men for a week or a month is within the compass of all those, who for profit or vanity pursue publicity. The daily record of the modern world passes few aspirants

by, and he, who takes delight in the vision of his name standing boldly in print, need seldom suffer disappointment. There are a thousand ways, in which the eager citizen may call attention to himself, and even if he fail in all else he may yet indite a letter to the papers.

And the camera has come to the aid of printer's ink. In this time of facile glory the photographer is beyond the reach of very few. How brave a show does Mr. X., the well-known author, make in his new motor-car! Thus literary eminence and manufacturing enterprise are illuminated in a single flash. The maker of cars rejoices that the world is thus reminded of his skill. The literary gentleman, remembering what Horace said, that the eye is more vividly imposed upon than the ear, recognises that his counterfeit image is worth two columns of lofty appreciation. Here, indeed, is the secret of modern fame. That hero is secure of glory whose face is familiar to the crowd. It is for this reason that the actor or politician become most

readily notorious. They achieve their effects not merely with their brains, but with their bodily presence. Their features are familiar to thousands who will never be privileged to address them. As they pass in the street they are pointed at with ecstatic fingers. Even their voices, the most persuasive and most rapidly transitory implements of fame, strike without strangeness upon the ear of the general. It is poetically just that they vanish most swiftly from the minds of men.

Yet the artist in fame well knows when and how to draw back. He will understand the point at which familiarity turns to contempt. He must be seen far seldom than his photograph. However keen may be his zest for visible glory, he must now and again enwrap himself in a mysterious gloom. For, by a curious paradox, the people, which apportions fame, does not like to be taken completely into its hero's confidence. It is prepared to suspect whoever comes to it in simple guise. Grandeur in its eyes should tran-

scend the ordinary measure of things and persons. The actor, who drives to the theatre from his suburb home, is a very different being from the buskined monster who glares over the footlights upon the pit. The orator, who shakes the Senate, is not the same man as the candidate who humbly solicits votes. Once upon a time the captain of a boat which carried passengers to Samoa discussed the merits of Stevenson with a devout pilgrim. 'Him a great man,' exclaimed the burly mariner. 'Don't you believe it. Why, many's the time he's sat in this boat with me.' A simple story, which reveals one danger lying in the footsteps of fame.

By a fortunate irony, he who pursues fame too zealously grasps a shadow. For a moment, no doubt, he basks in the sunshine of glory. He sees his face smile from the hoarding, and is proud. The sound of his name upon the lips of strangers fills him with exultation. But the fame, which he has contrived himself, or snatched in a happy moment from the fickle mob,

is forgotten in a night and leaves behind it no enduring lustre. The only fame worth cherishing is that, which comes unsought, which is born of good work faithfully accomplished, and of the appreciation of friends and equals. Mozart's twice-cited boast, that he wrote for himself and a few friends, proves that he looked not at time but at eternity. Shakespeare, whose fame is equal with the earth, took no thought of notoriety. When Byron described Lamb as the most ignoble follower of Southey and Company, who would have believed that Lamb's name and fame were destined to outlive the many pompous reputations of his age? In brief, many a man, who seems to his own time of the loftiest stature, is dwarfed to nothingness by the passage of a few years. And none may control the wayward accidents of fame. Brummel's manner of putting on a cravat, Jack Sheppard's trick of putting off his irons sufficed for immortality.

As if to show the changes and chances of reputation, there came an exhibition

of the works of Wenceslaus Hollar which set that master upon the pedestal he should have adorned two centuries ago. Never did etcher more nobly neglect the common approaches of fame. Born at Prague in 1607, he came to England with the Earl of Arundel in 1637, and, excepting the interval of the Civil War, he devoted himself with loyalty and single-mindedness to the practice of his art. That he fought for the king of his adopted country and was taken prisoner at Basing House proves the aristocracy of his mind. A vast number of incomparable plates prove the aristocracy of his craftsmanship. He was an equal master of landscape and portraiture. He could imprison upon a few inches of copper a spacious city. With a delicacy, which suggests that his hand was poised on wings, he drew the towers, the river, and the skies of London. To him we owe a shining record of our capital as it seemed to his artist's eye before the great fire. His skill has given us the portraits of the kings, soldiers, and courtiers,

who dominated the seventeenth century. Of him truly it might be said that he touched nothing that he did not adorn. And fame has overtaken him with slow and halting foot. Even prosperity, the least privilege of so fine a craftsman, was denied him. So long as the Earl of Arundel lived, he was sheltered from disaster. In his experience, at any rate, the patron might not be ranked with envy and the gaol. Forced back upon the print-sellers, he fought a long and losing battle with poverty. Nor did the restoration of Charles II. establish his fortunes. His plan for rebuilding London after the fire was not accepted, and though he worked while life was in him he could not make enough for his necessities. It is said that he was forced to beg of his creditors the pallet-bed upon which he died. Thus unequally are the gifts of fame and fortune distributed. Had Hollar made his work subservient to a love of passing glory, he would have been flattered amiably, and we should be deprived of a hundred master-

pieces. His reward is posthumous and belated. His memory outlives the memory of the most of his contemporaries. For it is part of the irony of life that other hands reap what the man of genius sows, and that it is the height of good fortune to escape an instant and a vulgar fame.

XXIX

THE GAIETY OF NATIONS

THERE is no quality of the human soul more shyly elusive than gaiety. It will visit none an unwilling guest, and he, who forces it upon others, commits as gross an outrage as the monster, who unlocks his sorrows to the public eye. If it would bring us delight, it must come and go as it pleases, flashing upon us like some bright-plumaged bird, and leaving us wiser and more joyous for its sudden apparition.

This waywardness of gaiety, for instance, does not suit the practical Teuton, who is so eagerly intent to demonstrate the superiority of Berlin that he would reduce the emotion—for the most of men a hope rather than a reality—to line and measure. All that is wanted to produce ‘gaiety,’ he says, is to instal the electric light, to lay on a tap

of Munich beer, to hire a troupe of Tziganes, and to keep your doors open all night. Above all, late hours and an easy Licensing Act are essential. If these be granted, then you shall laugh as long and as loud as you like ; in a fine spirit of pot-valiance, you shall turn night into day, and the merriment of beer shall lift from your shoulders all the heavy burdens of life.

The method is too simple to inspire confidence, and before we pack our bags, in obedience to the Teuton, and take refuge in the beer-palaces of Berlin, we might ask ourselves what we mean by gaiety. Look out the word 'gay' in Johnson's Dictionary, and you will find these apt equivalents : ' Airy, cheerful, merry, frolic.' The virtues which these epithets denote are the virtues of the heart and mind. You cannot purchase them as you buy boots, in the common mart. Their acquisition is in your power, and in the power of none other. They may be sought in solitude as easily as in the crowded haunt of pleasure-seekers. I can imagine gaiety in a desert, or the

inspissated gloom of misery in the splendid Panopticums of Berlin.

Nevertheless, it may be admitted that every nation has its own way of expressing gaiety. The French, before all, are masters of this delicate quality, and they are most apt to share it generously with others. Thackeray once said, with perfect truth, that he never landed at Calais without feeling that a weight of care had fallen from his shoulders like a discarded coat. There is something in the brisk and vivid air of France that forbids despondency. Even the unaccustomed traveller must rejoice with those about him. He must take his part in the keen curiosity and zest of life, which no Frenchman escapes. And in Paris he cannot but be conscious that there prevails a sound standard and measure of things. There is an atmosphere of art and letters, which envelops no corner of London. The poets of the quarter sing not that they may turn their songs to profit, but for love of their craft and pure joyousness of heart. You may find gaiety, if

you will, at the next corner. You are not asked to pay for it. All that is required of you before you enter into its full inheritance is to put away sordid ambitions, and to forget that the earth is a Tom Tiddler's ground, where the serious ones scramble for gold.

Such are the sentiments, which give to Paris a gaiety of heart we miss sometimes in the bustle of London. And, if you will surprise the visible embodiment of this gaiety, go in the afternoon upon the boulevards, at the hour of absinthe, and watch what Johnson's Dictionary would call the 'frolic' interchange of wit and thought. There in its perfection is the talk, ardent and sincere, which makes for gaiety in a far higher sense than shows, theatres, or gin-palaces. And, when night has fallen upon the city, cross the river and visit some far-distant café, where meet those cenacles of poetry, whose loyal members cheerfully carry aloft the banners of their school in the very jaws of poverty. There you may learn a lesson in high

spirits, which all the vulgar racket of Montmartre cannot teach.

It has been the misfortune of Paris that her loudly advertised 'gaiety' was long since discovered by London and New York. Her northern heights have become the goal of raffish pilgrimages. The sad trippers, who know not how to enjoy themselves, find bought pleasures ready to their hand in the restaurants of the Place Pigalle. There they can enjoy the privilege, so highly esteemed in Berlin, of sitting up all night in a heavily laden atmosphere of tobacco smoke and champagne. There they can listen to an empty chatter, in which they take no part, and smile back at a laughter incomprehensible to their timid souls. It is but a shadow, which they grasp. The gaiety, after which they pine, escapes them. How, indeed, should it thrive where its worshippers are 'personally conducted' ? Yet time was, when Montmartre, the capital of Paris, as it was proudly called, echoed with genuine merriment, when Rodolph Salis and Aristide

Bruant, its sovereign lords, proved how much wit might be packed into a little room. Alas! the puppet-plays of the Chat Noir are no more than a happy memory, and nothing is left upon the sacred hill save dull taverns, where joyousness is dealt out, amid a racket of glass and crockery, at so much a head.

And shall London emerge in triumph from this competition of gaiety? By no means, if we may believe the foreigners who visit our shores. They are convinced at a first glance that the English still take their pleasures as they took them in the time of Froissart. There are no cafés in London to tempt the hardy Teuton from his bed. An inexorable law closes the doors of all hostelries half an hour after midnight. It seems as though the curfew of William the Norman was still in force. The poor tourist, whose toes itch to join in the twinkling dance, finds this simple pleasure cruelly denied him. No wonder he sighs for the ampler licence of his own land! No wonder he condemns

his hosts in a fury of rage as killjoys close-bound in the iron bonds of Puritanism !

Yet his condemnation is undeserved, as he would speedily discover, if he were permitted to look through the windows of our clubs and houses. The life of modern London is like a Moorish palace : it shows only its darkest side to the world. During the last centuries a complete change of manners has taken place in our metropolis. The rufflers, the roaring-boys, the blades, and the Mohocks have followed each other into the limbo of forgetfulness. Bob Logic and Corinthian Tom no longer box the watch in the purlieus of Covent Garden. The age of night-houses is past. Our gaiety breathes a quieter and more private air. We refuse obstinately to exhibit to the eyes of strangers our emotions of joy as of grief. But the true gaiety of mind and spirit, cloistered though it be, still flourishes in our midst. It may be difficult to defend our inveterate practice of keeping to ourselves the best of our pleasures. Not even the envious man, who has more than

a tourist's knowledge of London, can deny that joy and lightheartedness sparkle there for those who seek them.

Concerning the gaiety of Berlin there can be no doubt. It is of that poor kind that insists upon publicity. In the beer-halls, which sleep neither by day nor by night, there is an eager resolution to snatch every one of the four-and-twenty fleeting hours. On all sides are theatres, music halls, cabarets, restaurants, to capture the wayward fancy of the citizen. It is as though every man you met slapped his chest and shouted in your ear, 'See how cheerful I can be!' As once upon a time I walked down the Friedrichstrasse, bright with all the glare and glitter of Panopticums, I remembered a picture, by John Leech, which appeared many years ago in *Punch*. It represented two women, damp and draggled, standing at a street corner, under the rain; and says one to the other: 'How long have you been gay?' A sardonic question which you would put to no other capital in Europe.

XXX

PRACTICAL JOKING

A QUESTION asked and an answer given in the House of Commons remind us that the habit of practical joking is not yet extinct. On the contrary, it survives in its simplest and most primitive form. To bring a sudden charge of stealing a watch against a friend is what the jokesmiths themselves would call 'the classical example.' It has shaken the sides of many a dullard with laughter. Theodore Hook, I am sure, a master in the kind, often inflicted this species of cruelty upon his friends, and the wonder is that it was not familiar to the very youngest policeman on the beat.

There is no word to be said in extenuation of the practical joker. He is commonly a boisterous fellow who pretends to wit, having none. When tongue and brain

fail him he must devise some noisy discomfort for his friend. He thinks that he has achieved a triumph if, like Sir Humphrey Noddy in the play, he has 'twisted a fellow's hat over a little river that is not navigable, and he is forced to go a mile about to fetch it.' At his least subtle, he has as much grace as a clown in a circus. He is content to trip and punch his companions. When he pursues the more subtle sort of joke, he does no more than impose upon somebody's good faith.

His method is always the same. He makes a statement, as elaborate as you please, and, when his statement is accepted for truth by an honourably credulous person, he shouts with merriment. This man, says he to a policeman, has stolen my watch; the policeman, knowing no evil, believes what he hears, a crowd gathers, and when the farce is done a grave injury is inflicted upon a perfectly innocent man.

Many years since, a French philosopher noted the pleasure which men take in the

misfortunes of others. It is this pleasure, and this pleasure alone, which can explain the self-complacency of the practical joker. The end and aim of all his experiments are to involve others in visible and public discomfort. When once his victims are placed in a ridiculous or humiliating position, his triumph is complete. That the laughter of fools goes with him is doubtless an added joy. Not merely do they chuckle at the misery of those, whom they never saw before, but they observe with a kind of envy what they think the work of a master, and they hope against hope that some day they will devise a trick not unworthy of comparison.

Were the practical joker a man of sense, he could feel no reasonable pride in his own achievement. He rarely displays a quick ingenuity. He follows with a slavish devotion the well-tried examples of ancient days. He goes about his work with a solemn pedantry which would bore if it did not distress his victims. His jokes cannot by their nature be unpremeditated. They

are prepared with elaborate care and solemn circumstance ; they are rehearsed with all the gravity of a theatrical performance, and at every step they are separated farther from the wit, which is fondly pretended to be their inspiration. For very young undergraduates and newly joined soldiers some extenuation may be found. The man, who carries a love of practical joking into middle life, should be exiled from society as an untamed, irredeemable savage.

It is wholly without vanity that we confess that practical joking is a peculiarly English vice. With us the comic spirit has breathed more faintly than in the land of France. The fool in the pillory has seemed to many the very type of humour. The red-hot poker of immemorial pantomimes has accustomed us to the crudest form of mirth. Yet, though the practical joke drew intermittent laughter from the beginning of our history, though Cromwell's jam-tarts are a legend, it was, by an odd paradox, the restored Court of Charles II.,

which first set this infamous form of wit upon a solid foot. The memoirs of Count Grammont display in not a very pleasant light the determination of courtiers and maids of honour to involve their friends and enemies in ridicule, and the measure of their wit may be taken by the fact that nothing served them for a jest so well as physical deformity.

There was, for instance, the trick put upon Lady Muskerrey, a rich heiress to whom nature had been sparing of her gifts. 'Of two legs uncommonly short, one was much shorter than the other,' and 'a face suitable to this description gave the finishing stroke to this disagreeable figure.' When, therefore, the Queen devised a masquerade of Babylonian ladies, what better chance did mischievous maid of honour ever grasp? The Queen sent notes to all those she appointed to take part in the dance, and Miss Hamilton lost no time in counterfeiting a note to Lady Muskerrey. The poor creature, her head turned with vanity, instantly got into her coach to

seek information of the merchants, who traded to the Levant, as to how the ladies of quality dressed in Babylon. And she appeared at the threshold of the Court on the proper day, 'the devil of a phantom in masquerade,' having about her at least sixty ells of gauze and silver tissue, 'not to mention a sort of a pyramid upon her head adorned with a hundred thousand baubles.' Thus the poor creature's ill-omened vanity was exposed, and it was only the tact of Lord Muskerry, which saved the jest from going beyond the bounds of cruelty, and prevented the misshapen princess of Babylon from standing up to dance in all the glory of ridicule.

The duller times of our Hanoverian sovereigns encouraged with what energy they might the practical joke, which perhaps reached its zenith under the Regency. That the dandies should have indulged in horseplay is something of a slur upon their cold, impassible reputation. It is less strange that horseplay should have flourished in the nineteenth century, for

horseplay is but the reverse of the respectable medal, a sort of reaction against the autocratic rule of sentimentality. But, as the years pass, the method of the horseplay grows more and more childish. How poor the invention of the practical joker has been our annals and our literature alike confess. The common artifice of personation was long since stale. What shall we say concerning the ingenuity of those humorists who half a century ago invited thousands to the Tower of London 'to view the annual ceremony of washing the white lions' ? They had their poor reward in seeing all the approaches to Tower Hill packed with purposeless cabs, and doubtless they went home, proud in the consciousness that at last they had really accomplished something.

And now that the Victorian, early or late, has had his day, there might surely be an end to this boisterous nonsense. The practical joke should have gone out of fashion long since with chignons and side-spring boots. It is but a survival of a dull custom, which

Shakespeare alone has lifted above the level of folly. The one jest of the kind which I recall with pleasure is that wrought upon Christopher Sly. ‘Sirs, I will practise on this drunken man,’ says the lord in the ‘Induction.’

‘What think you, if he were conveyed to bed,
Wrapp’d in sweet clothes, rings put upon his
fingers,
A most delicious banquet by his bed,
And brave attendants near him when he wakes,
Would not the beggar then forget himself?’

And forget himself he did in such sort that with his ‘madam wife’ by his side he let ‘the world slip,’ and in all the joy of an enforced splendour witnessed the *Taming of the Shrew*.

XXXI

ROOKS AND PIGEONS

THE case of Mrs. Horne, who generously invited her friends to share with her all the wealth of Madagascar, and was ignominiously brought before the courts, differed in no essential details from the accepted type. It is true that there were elements of farce in the grim comedy. One gentleman, cast for a part, who combined in his single person the millionaire and the undischarged bankrupt, and who (honest soul) preferred to take his rum out of the bottle, overstepped the limits of comic propriety. The intellectual atmosphere, too, in which the drama was played afforded an amiable diversity. The strange hints of religious enthusiasm given us by witnesses, the fervent discussion concerning the shape of the earth, which softened the stern

financiers to our hearts, were a new and pleasant invention. For the rest, the old comedy was played with the old zest and to the old purpose. The rooks on the one hand, the pigeons on the other, did what was expected of them with the precision and energy of well-trained actors.

In truth, the uniformity of fraud will never cease to surprise us. The human race profits nothing by experience. The centuries do not wither the honoured artifices, and vanity and greed will always prevent the hungry dupe from taking warning by his fellows. Though men and women have been deceived a thousand times by a familiar trick they are as ready as ever to fall victims again to their simplicity and hope. The spider needs little cunning. However openly he spins his web, the fly will walk into his parlour as into a place of hospitality and joyous resort.

For instance, the gold brick of America is as widely known and has been as pitilessly exposed as the enterprise of the Spanish prisoner. Yet, if we may judge by the persistence of those frauds, they

are still profitable to their contrivers. A man dies ; in a few weeks a letter, obviously the work of a familiar friend, arrives at his address, and is opened by his executor. The poor man is told that only a small sum is necessary for the complete purchase of the mine, which has been so long the object of his solicitude. The executor hastens to America, opens his purse with avaricious anxiety, and is left with no better consolation than a gold brick. And, though many have ventured their money to aid the hapless and well-advertised victim of Spanish justice, no human eye has ever seen the treasure, of which it is his good fortune to dispose.

Mrs. Horne's imagination soared high above gold bricks and hidden treasure. She saw with the eye of her sanguine mind a vast kingdom in Madagascar, where timber, gold, and precious stones were waiting to enrich all those, who would take a share in her grandiose project. That she found friends ready to entrust her with their money need not surprise us. From the beginning of time there has been a glamour

about gold, and silver, and jewels which few can resist, whether they lurk in the mines of Peru or are hidden in the mountains of Mexico.

Some years ago, for instance, the famous Madame Humbert deceived the world of Paris with no better artifice than a tin box, within whose slender limits was contained the untold wealth of two mythical heroes. The box, the symbol and treasure-house of millions, seen but never opened, remained for years an inexhaustible source of gold. That it contained nothing but an old newspaper and a few sous was part of Madame Humbert's irony, and at least it was more solid than the Madagascar of Mrs. Horne's imagining. But Madame Humbert's artifice had no claim to originality. A similar trick had been played by an English boy a century before, and patriotism bids us recall his achievement with an interested satisfaction.

Abraham Causton was the boy's name, and he was born in 1800 not far from Newmarket. Gifted with an intelligence far above his fellows, he was sent, though

a peasant, to Shrewsbury School. There he became an accomplished scholar, and, what is more to our point, the cleverest impostor of his time. He, too, invented a box, but it was of iron, and buried deep in the garden of a nameless benefactor, who met him in a stage-coach, and endowed him with all his worldly goods for no better reason than that the boy contradicted him in the course of a political discussion. The young Abraham told his story with the truthful simplicity of phrase, of which the swindler is always master, and he had no difficulty in winning the confidence of his fellows. Being by temperament a true artist, he was never guilty of boastful display. His policy was to drop hints rather than to make aggressive statements. Mr. Weatherby, the New-market lawyer, was from the very first the boy's friend and adviser. The knowledge, which he had gained among the sharps of the racecourse, did not suggest for a moment that Causton was capable of dishonesty, and thus wisely supported the Fortunate Youth, as he was speedily

named, found no hindrance in the path of glory. His fortune, fed by rumour, increased daily. A modest half-million at first, it presently surpassed the computation of the boldest accountant. He was the creditor, said the gossips, of every crowned head in Europe, and his political influence equalled his wealth. With an admirable cunning he proposed no plan of life, which did not become a gentleman. Mere boy though he was, he was determined to raise his family to gentility, and to educate his eldest brother at the University of Cambridge. Indeed, he went so far as to enter him as a fellow-commoner at Emmanuel College, declaring at the same time, by a happy inspiration, that he himself had scholarship enough, and could sink no lower than to a political career. The whole world trusted and applauded him. Bankers vied with one another in giving him credit. An eminent goldsmith declared that 'he might have cleared all the goods in his shop.' But though now and then he astonished the simpler-minded

by giving them the sight of a cheque for half a million, he adopted an air of assured tranquillity, and refused to adorn his person with diamonds.

How long he might have lived upon the easy faith of the world I know not. He made one mistake and was ruined. He had boasted proudly that he expected a consignment of wines from his vineyards near Mount Etna, and asked a party to test them at dinner. One of his guests, thinking no evil, idly picked up a cork and read upon it the name of a London wine merchant. He visited the merchant, and discovered that Thames Street, not Mount Etna, was the provenance of the Fortunate Youth's famous vintage. The discovery of fraud was then a matter of weeks. Causton, in sublime unconsciousness, had left England, with a discreet retinue, for a tour through his European estates. He was speedily overtaken. Yet his youth and ingenuity pleaded for him. He suffered no punishment, and when at last the fame of his exploits had fallen into

oblivion he took orders and became a successful if obscure tutor.

The Fortunate Youth soared on the wings of fancy high above his fellows. The motive of the common swindler is plain for all to see. It is greed pure and simple. The man, who hopes to acquire wealth without labour or delay, is readily led into the path of deception. The dupe's motive is not less ignoble. Only in him the greed of the idler is complicated by vanity. He is so sure he cannot be tricked that he eagerly gives credence to the most outrageous falsehood. He will show his friends, says he, how profitable are his foresight and his courage. And when, in his foolish attempt to get rich quickly, he is robbed even of the poor pittance that is his, how shall we condole with him? After all, he is but the necessary accomplice of the swindler. If there were no pigeons there would be no rooks.

